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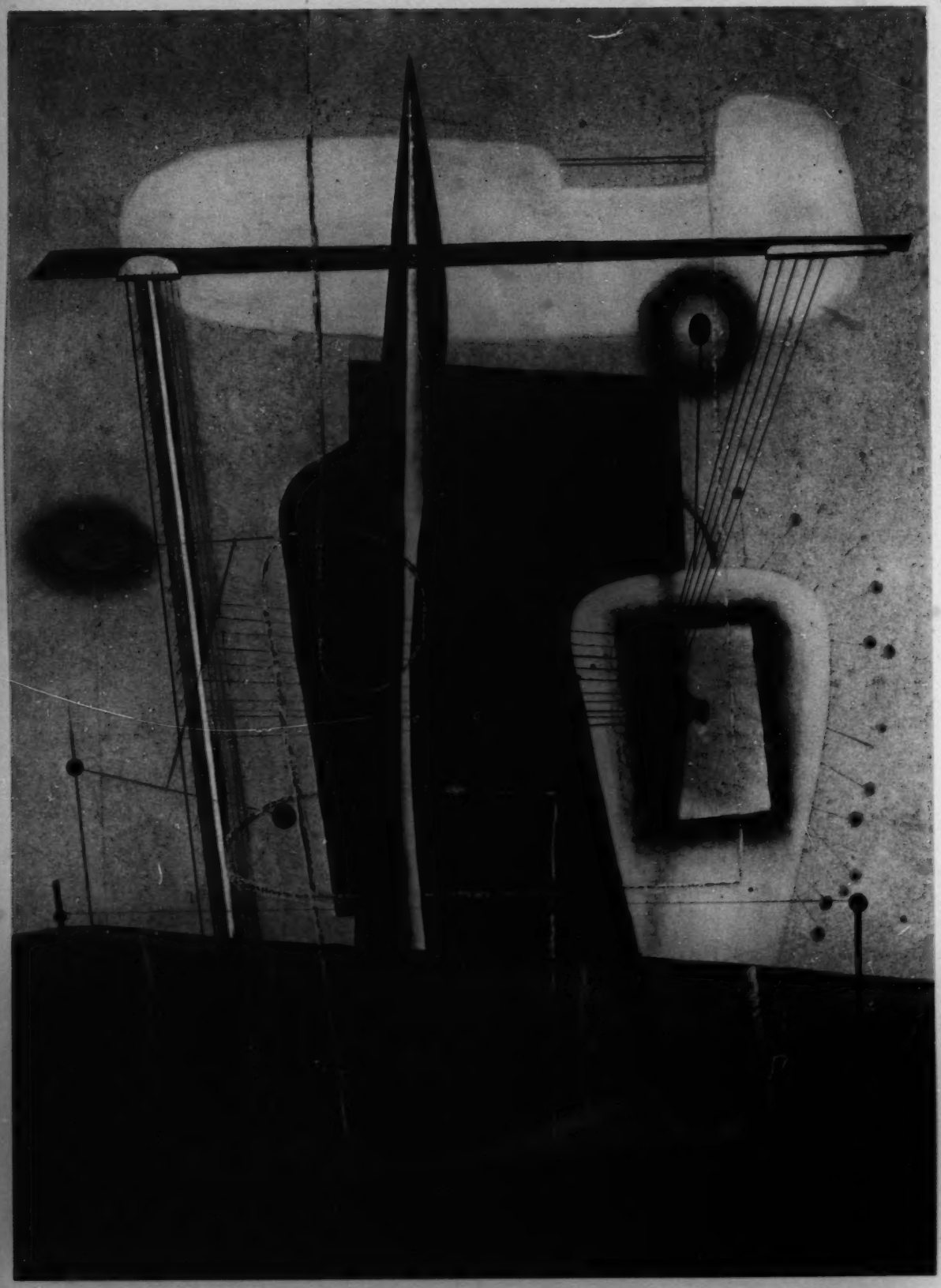
List 33

an Arts Council exhibition

JOHN TUNNARD

John Tunnard 1900 – 1971

Illustrated on cover
Transformation of red 1939



JOHN TUNNARD

1900 – 1971

Royal Academy of Arts
5 March – 11 April 1977

Kettle's Yard Gallery, Cambridge
14 May – 7 June 1977

Kettering Gallery
11 June – 2 July 1977

Manchester City Art Gallery
16 July – 14 August 1977

Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
20 August – 11 September 1977

Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance
1 October – 29 October 1977

Frontispiece
Composition 1939

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Foreword

The suggestion that we should organise this exhibition came from the artist's cousin Peter Tunnard, whom we should like to thank for his help throughout. John Tunnard was an ARA and it is appropriate that the show should be held in the Diploma Galleries. We are grateful to Sir Hugh Casson, President of the Royal Academy, to the Council and to the staff for their collaboration.

Mark Glazebrook has selected the exhibition and studied Tunnard's career and life for new material for the catalogue, which will be a lasting account of Tunnard's achievement. We would like to thank Rudolph Glossop, a close friend of the artist, who has contributed a personal memoire which has added another dimension to this study. Finally we would like to thank the lenders who are listed on page 42, who without exception have responded enthusiastically to our requests.

Joanna Drew
Director of Exhibitions

Author's acknowledgements

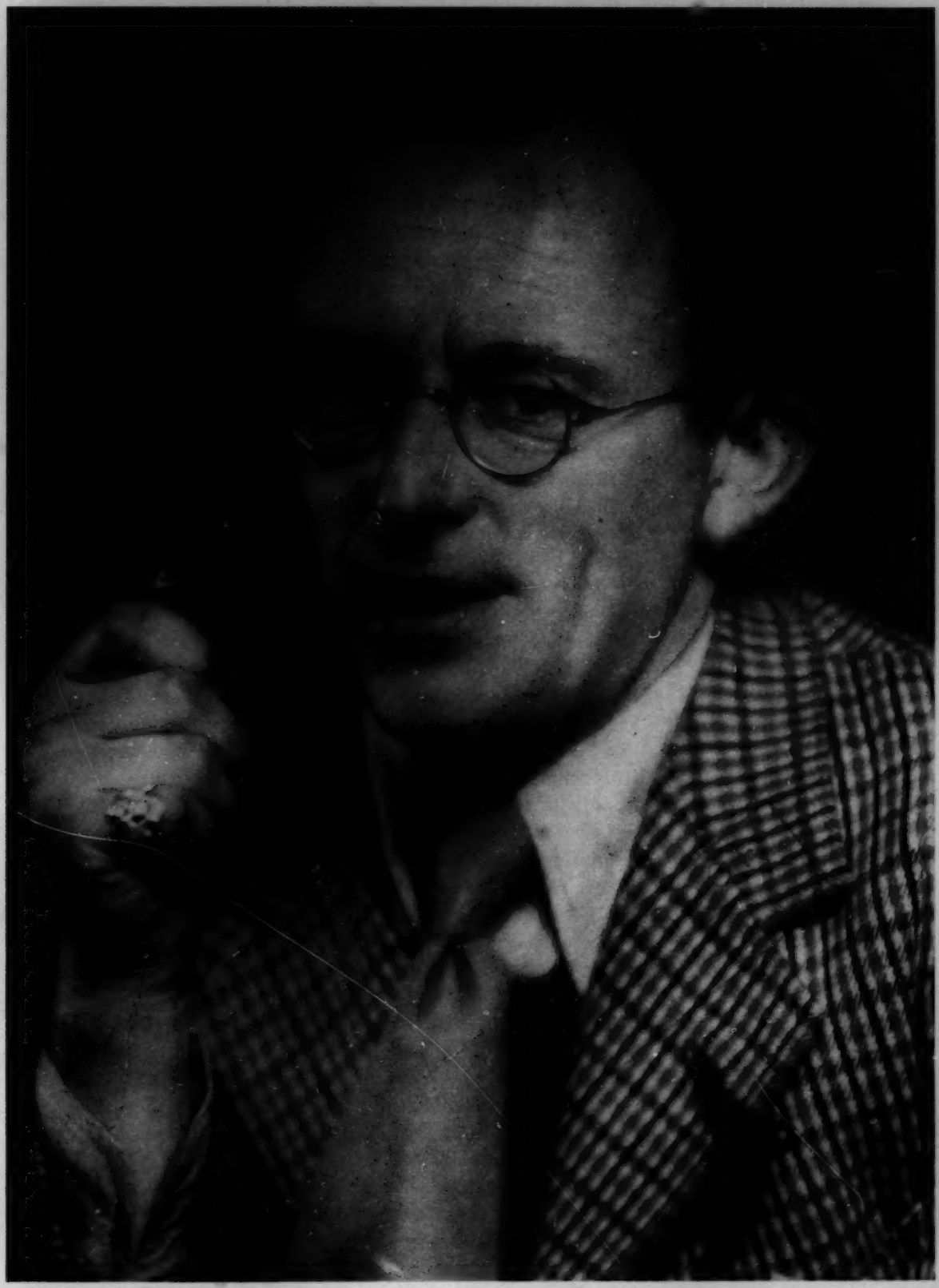
While accepting responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation, I would like to thank the many people who have volunteered information. This has helped me both with the selection of the exhibition and with my article on Tunnard's development. Peter Tunnard gave unstinted help in tracing works; Rudolph Glossop, among other kindnesses, took me by car to John Tunnard's various haunts and homes in Cornwall. Michael Canney specially wrote for me a most useful memoir from which I have quoted.

All those who have lent paintings (listed on page 42) almost without exception have also helped me in my research and I am grateful to them.

I would also like to thank the following: Mrs Asher, Zuleika Dobson, Alexander Dunbar, Mrs R. Glossop, Miss Anna Gruetzner, Mrs Kessler, Mrs Julie Lawson, Lefevre Gallery, Morris Kestelman, Mrs Neil MacRoberts, the Mayor Gallery, George Melly, the Redfern Gallery, Royal Academy Library, Royal College of Art Library, Lady Tate, Tate Gallery Library, Trevor Thomas, Anton Zwemmer, Desmond Zwemmer.

Mark Glazebrook

John Tunnard *c.* 1939



John Tunnard A personal appreciation by Rudolph Glossop

I met John Tunnard at the Guggenheim Jeune in 1939, where Peggy Guggenheim gave him an important exhibition, his first of non-representational pictures. It was an occasion which he always remembered with gratitude. He was a striking figure in a well-tailored suit of black and white houndstooth check. Few people could have carried it off, but John, in full conversational flood, his brilliant eyes glittering behind steel rimmed spectacles and with a strong hint of country gentleman in the background, did. We left the gallery for a Cork Street bar, and stayed there, talking, till it closed. Thus started a friendship which lasted until his death in 1971.

Such a friendship is not based upon personal liking alone. There are other bonds, one of which is the retention of the same adolescent interests. In our case they were natural history and a strong feeling for landscape, not only on the broad scale of the painter or the geologist, but also for the ecological detail where, to him, art and science met, and where many of his works were conceived.

Tunnard's ancestors, since the Middle Ages, had lived at Frampton, in Lincolnshire, between Boston and the Wash. Although the vagaries of one in the 19th century, which included compulsive gambling, had allowed land to pass from their hands, John had strong links with the place. His uncle was Vicar of Frampton, and he himself, after his father's death, was lay rector of the parish. There he learnt to shoot and, as a boy, his happiest holidays from Charterhouse were spent lodging with a gamekeeper, on the edge of the marsh. He became a wildfowler and kept a schuit and a punt gun at Fosdyke Bridge, where he also learnt to handle a small and cranky type of boat among sandbanks and dangerous currents. Later, like many another wise man, he put away his guns and became an observer.

In 1919 he went to the Royal College of Art, and met and married a fellow student, Mary 'Bob' Robertson, his most acute and creative critic. Some thought that she neglected her own talent, but later she collaborated with him in the design and production of hand-blocked materials which are outstanding among the more beautiful creations of their kind.

In 1930 the Tunnards settled in Cadgwith, then a small but active fishing village in a remote cove on the eastern side of the Lizard peninsula. It was a primitive community, the majority of its inhabitants belonged to one of two family groups, and strangers were

strangers. John was accepted and is still remembered with affection and respect. At Cadgwith an early interest in entomology revived and at the suggestion of the late Mr R. B. Benson of the British Museum of Natural History, he collected and studied the distribution of *Kleidotoma subaptera*, a species of the *Hymenoptera* found in seaweed on the shore. Later he collected sawflies, and some of his specimens may be found in the Museum. He hoped to discover a new species associated with the *Lusitanian flora* of Cornwall, but in this he was disappointed. Periods of work in his studio alternated with weeks spent in the field, and these excursions when he was wholly immersed in the countryside were important to his development as an artist. Although he made no direct contribution to botany he knew a great deal about the rare plants of Cornwall, and visited their stations, from time to time, to see if they survived. I particularly remember *Illecebrum* in a marsh near the old Ding Dong Mine, a rare juniper near Mullion and spotted catsear and wild chives near Kynance.

Some of our expeditions were geological. From Cadgwith we went to the north coast of West Penwith, which he then thought grim, to the old Levant Mine, where I had worked underground in 1922. There he saw Levant Zawn, a deep gully in the cliff, its rocky sides brilliantly stained with green and red minerals of copper and iron. Within a few weeks he had painted *Levant Mine*, which now hangs in the art gallery of Melbourne, Australia, and later he painted other pictures of the same theme, one of which is in the permanent collection of the Arts Council of Great Britain.

In 1947 the Tunnards moved to Garden Mine Cottage at Watch Croft on Morvah Hill, just below the crest of the high moors and facing west; a low house solidly built of granite masonry salvaged from an abandoned tin mine. It was lonely, in the spring ravens croaked overhead, in summer adders basked on the overgrown waste dumps, and every year a pair of carrion crows bred among the ruins of an engine house; or did, until one day at dawn a fox raided their eyrie and devoured the young birds. John said that the noise of battle was indescribable. Below the house the ground fell away steeply, a wilderness of heather and granite boulders where badgers had their setts. Beyond this hillside-moor lay cultivated land, along cliff edge Celtic fields, and then the ever changing sea. A strange place; once at sunset we saw a brilliant liquid green flash at the instant when the sun's limb vanished below the horizon.

In 1952 the Tunnards went to Trethinnick, in the Lamorna valley, a house with six acres of neglected land. Bounding the garden along the valley road was a belt of swamp, a thick tangle of overgrown willows, planted many years ago to supply withies for lobster-pots. Through it there led a drive to gently sloping ground on which the house was built, and behind there rose the steep valley-side with outcrops of granite. Faced with this situation John revealed a new

talent, that for landscape gardening. He welded these three dissimilar places into a garden of interest and beauty.

Near the house he made a lawn, herbaceous borders and a rockery, on the valley side he planted rhododendron, azaleas, magnolias and ericas, and in the swamp, where twayblade grew wild, he planned and partly completed a bog-garden with gunnera, and primulas. It is amazing what he accomplished. Had he not chosen to be a painter he might well have been an outstanding civil engineer or architect. It is significant that on visiting his friend Professor A. W. Skempton FRS, at Imperial College he was attracted by drawings and designs for work on the Eau Brink Cut, and later painted two pictures, their composition based on the Fellenius method for embankment design. They perfectly combine his interest in science and landscape.

He never lost his early interest in ornithology. Although he was not a systematic observer he knew a great deal about birds. There was excitement at Trethinnick, after myxamatosis had killed off the rabbits, when he saw buzzards flying across the valley with adders writhing in their talons, to be broken up on the edge of the nest and fed to the young.

At Lamorna we started the Grumbla Club, so called from a valley near Sancreed, 'A real stone-age word,' said John. There were four

London Students Dance Band *c.* 1921 with Hugo Rignold at the piano and John Tunnard on the drums

members, John Tunnard, Sir Samuel (Peter) Hoare, Neil Treseder and myself. Each member had a gold tiepin, designed by John; his own a sawfly, Peter's a crotchet, Neil's a camelia – he has since published a book on them – and mine a geological hammer. The Club made a memorable expedition to Wistman's Wood, on Dartmoor, said to be the only scrap of primaeval forest left in England.

Two other gifts gave pleasure to his friends, dancing and music. He loved dancing, and as an only child would dance for hours before a looking glass in his nursery. Contemporaries at the Royal College of Art still remember his performances in the Students' Common Room. All his dances were improvisations on traditional American negro styles. No one who saw him dance at a New Year's Eve party at Lamorna will forget his timing and virtuosity within the limited convention of soft shoe shuffle. Although he had some knowledge of classical music, he was a devotee of jazz. While at the Royal College of Art he and Hugo Rignold, who was then a student at the Royal Academy of Music, started a dance band. Rignold at the piano, John, with his perfect sense of rhythm, at the drums, and two unidentified students, playing saxophones. The band had a considerable success, and achieved an almost professional standing. The high-spirited young-man-about-town of the early 20s remained an element in

Tunnard on the drums with his band of Cornish fishermen at Cadgwith. Left to right Albert James, Affy Wylie, Buller Arthur.

John's character till the end.

To spend a day with John in London was as stimulating as a day spent with him on the moors. We would start from the Chelsea Arts Club in Church Street, walk up to Knightsbridge to look at shop windows; then to Bond Street and the galleries, and so on down St James's Street to the old Union Club for lunch. I remember a day when, after lunch, John stood on the hearth rug in the Smoking Room, and talked about wild-fowling on the Wash, with such knowledge and vivacity as to attract and rivet every somnolent member in the room, not one of whom had the faintest idea who he was. A remarkable social feat.

The house at Lamorna was Bob's domain, and exquisite. Although she very rarely left it, or her garden, she was acutely aware of contemporary ideas, and with 19th-century furniture, modern fabrics and flowers, she filled it with light and colour, creating a perfect setting for John's pictures. Bob read widely; in poetry she most admired Emily Dickenson. John also read modern poets, and in particular E. E. Cumming, but a poem from which he sometimes quoted was Masefield's *Reynard the Fox*.

No one saw John when he painted, for then solitude was essential to him. The studio was quite apart, at Cadgwith in a fishloft on the edge of the cove, at Garden Mine Cottage in a hut on the moor, and at Lamorna in a small corrugated iron shack, hidden in woodland beside the stream. When painting he entered a state of concentration and absolute absorption such as one associates with philosophers and creative mathematicians. He once told me how, standing before a meticulously prepared gesso ground, he would hesitate in fear before making the first brush stroke which might influence the whole composition. Once started, he worked with extraordinary energy and intensity. Then he would relax and go back to the cliffs and the moors, where he found those natural shapes which inspired and inform even the more abstract and geometrical of his later pictures.

He had absolute integrity, never did he compromise with fashion, and never did he paint a picture unless compelled by his genius.

John and Bob lie buried in Zennor churchyard. All who knew them are sadly the poorer for the loss of those two gifted, gay and complex people; but in John's pictures vitality, intellect, trained observation and a sense of wonder will forever express the unique beauty of Cornwall.

John Tunnard Development and influences
by Mark Glazebrook

By an intriguing and somewhat mysterious process which took shape in the seclusion of a Cornish fishing village, John Tunnard became one of the very few convinced and convincingly 'modern' English artists of his generation.

In the middle and late 30s his modernity was a matter of style. Not only Surrealism but also the Abstract and Constructivist movements were mirrored in his work and Miró in particular was an overt influence. In the 40s Tunnard half chose and half invented strikingly modern motifs. He painted shapes which owed, or seemed to owe, their existence to technology, to the extent that an article[1] on him by John Anthony Thwaites, who knew his work in detail was entitled *The Technological Eye*. A few paintings of the 50s and many more of the 60s go further, perhaps, in the same direction by evoking the world of outer space, a subject scarcely touched by artists as distinct from science fiction illustrators.

Behind these up-to-date or at least contemporary concerns was something more traditional and perhaps more English: a love of nature and of landscape. Despite the urban activity of playing in and organising semi-professional jazz bands in the 20s, Tunnard was first and foremost a countryman. More than this, he became an enthusiastic naturalist. It is difficult to assess the precise influence of this interest in natural history on his work as a whole, but it becomes obvious in some of his insufficiently known paintings of the 50s. Many of his first efforts, always a good clue to an artist's temperament, are romantic landscapes. They were exhibited at the Redfern Gallery in 1933, some four years after Tunnard had decided to become a painter rather than a textile designer. Less than a decade later, when the influences of 'modern art' had been digested (and in particular when he had rejected that tendency epitomised by Mondrian to renounce illusory space) the sky, the sea and the land return to set the scene for what we think of, perhaps, as a typical Tunnard – a vision of his own distinctive world.

The ability to be distinctive and therefore to be, or to appear, original has been a *sine qua non* of the modern artist. Tunnard possessed this ability, and although one side of his nature was that of a recluse by the standards of most of his contemporaries, it earned him a public reputation. Of course like almost all artists of some note he had his share of neglect as well as fame.

His promise was first spotted and recorded in print by P. G.

1. Reprinted on page 47.

Konody, as art critic of *The Observer*, when reviewing the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 1931. Two years later his first one-man show caused little stir, but his second at Guggenheim Jeune in 1939, backed by an article in the *London Bulletin*, was a success. He continued to exhibit and sell paintings during the war, and during the 40s his reputation spread to the United States, where certain avant-garde painters (Rothko[2] in particular) took note of his work, and where museums, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, acquired pictures.

As with many English artists of the period the literature[3] on Tunnard is not extensive. There are numerous brief mentions in the normal outlets of journalistic criticism and these are occasionally frivolous, rarely hostile sometimes informative and often enthusiastic. The possibility of including him in the Penguin Modern Painters series was mooted at one stage. Nothing came of it, but Herbert Read was a support and reproduced a Tunnard in his revised edition of *Art Now* in 1948.

In the 50s he went out of fashion. In the 60s there was a revival of interest of two different sorts. In the first place there were one-man shows, predominantly of recent work, at commercial galleries, notably McRoberts and Tunnard (Peter Tunnard, a director, was his cousin) in 1959, 1961 and 1964. Secondly, there was a renewed focus on early paintings in two important art historical surveys. In 1962 came the Welsh Arts Council's *British Art and the Modern Movement 1930–40*, planned and organised by Tom Cross, with a catalogue introduction by Alan Bowness. This was followed in 1965 by Marlborough Fine Art's *Art in Britain 1930–40 centred around Axis, Circle, Unit One*, with notes and documentation by Jasia Reichardt and articles by Herbert Read. In between these two exhibitions a very important Tunnard, *Psi* (unfortunately unobtainable for the present exhibition), came back to London with the Arts Council's showing of *The Peggy Guggenheim Collection* at the Tate.

In a sense Tunnard was becoming an artist of fame and promise at one and the same time. When he died in 1971, the year also in which he was included in the Hamet Gallery's exhibition *The British Contribution to Surrealism*, his reputation had not crystallised or settled. Because of his singularity it is hard to say how far he succeeded in his own aims (if indeed such aims could be defined precisely in words) and harder to find another artist against whom to judge him with fairness and reason. We can compare various English artists born within a decade of Tunnard; for example, Coldstream with Graham Bell, Moore with Hepworth, Kenneth Martin with Mary Martin. By aesthetic standards Tunnard's work compares very favourably with that of most, though not all, of the English artists[4] catalogued as exhibiting at the *International Surrealist Exhibition* of 1936, although aesthetic merit was not the point of Surrealism. Tunnard himself did not exhibit with the Surrealists

2. Michael Canney, curator of the Newlyn Art Gallery in the 60s, recalls Mark Rothko on a visit to the gallery instantly recognising a Tunnard and saying, 'I'd wondered what happened to him. We were pretty interested in Tunnard at one time in the States – I was,' or words to that effect.

3. See Bibliography on page 46.

4. The English artists in the catalogue were Eileen Agar, John Banting, John Selby Bigge, Edward Burra, Cecil Collins, P. Norman Dawson, Merlyn Evans, David Gascoyne, S. V. Hayter, Charles Howard, Humphrey Jennings, Rupert Lee, Robert Medley, Reuben Mednikoff, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Grace W. Pailthorpe, Roland Penrose, Graham Sutherland, Julian Trevelyan.

until later and never joined the movement formally. Indeed, in the *London Bulletin* of January/February 1939 he labelled himself (or was labelled) an 'abstract' artist and he showed in the exhibition *Abstract Paintings by Nine British Artists* at Alex Reid and Lefevre later that year. If we take the seven painters of the historic Unit One group, formed in 1933 when Tunnard had only just commenced his career as a painter, we may judge that Nash, Nicholson and Wadsworth are artists of considerably greater achievement than Tunnard but that he is at least as interesting in his way as Armstrong, Bigge[5] and Hillier are in theirs. Considered as a painter, and Tunnard rejoiced in paint, he is perhaps a more significant and rewarding artist than Burra – whose brilliance is surely that of an imaginative illustrator. This retrospective exhibition should demonstrate that Tunnard's paintings of the late 30s and early 40s have stood the test of time exceedingly well and that his work as a whole adds up to that of a notable individualist, ahead of his time by English standards (despite a late start) whose *development* is instructive.

Although certain critics have stressed the consistency of his style and vision it would be a mistake to think that one Tunnard is much like another. The changes are often slight and subtle but sometimes quite marked (after 1933 dramatically so) and the selection of this exhibition, the first retrospective one, attempts to bring out Tunnard's scarcely recognised capacity for development as well as the intrinsic quality of his work. Had Herbert Read been alive to see it, he would not have been able to write, as he did in 1965[6], 'The style he [Tunnard in 1930] then found has remained remarkably consistent from the beginning and even in technique and format there is not much variation.... Tunnard immediately found a formal language of his own and one that is not imitative or obviously related to the style of any of his immediate predecessors.' It was not so simple as that as we shall see.

The Farm Pond 1933

5. Bigge's work is seldom exhibited and is therefore hard to assess.

6. In the article reprinted on page 52.

Tunnard did not work steadily. There are bursts of activity – a critic reviewing the Guggenheim Jeune exhibition in 1939 calculated a rate of two gouaches a day – followed by dormant periods during which the batteries of inspiration were being recharged. He destroyed some paintings but not a large proportion. He started his career as a painter quite late, when he was almost thirty, the age at which Christopher Wood, born a year after Tunnard, ended his life. The net result is a substantial but by no means a large oeuvre, probably less than two thousand items. There are a handful of drawings, a few early oils on canvas, a fair quantity of large and small paintings on board coated with gesso, but the bulk is of gouaches on paper.

An important part of the foundation of Tunnard's artistic vision was laid during his childhood and young manhood. He was born at Caesar's Camp, Sandy, Bedfordshire, the only child of John Charles Tunnard of Frampton-by-Boston, Lincolnshire, on 17th May 1900. J. C. Tunnard was by birth and inclination a country gentleman and a sportsman. The family fortune had suffered considerable reductions in his grandfather's day. Until the time of his marriage to an heiress whose family's wealth came from sugar in the West Indies, J. C. Tunnard solved the problem of earning a living by becoming a sporting painter. He was first apprenticed to a painter in London and then went to live in York.

Painting by J. C. Tunnard 1934

In theory, therefore, the background was favourable for John Tunnard to become a painter, although in practice his parents at one period at least wished him to go into the city. For a very brief period, probably after leaving school, he deferred to them and worked for a firm of stockbrokers. Eventually, of course, the son became a very different sort of painter from his father who did not hold with modern art.

A more vital influence on the final form that Tunnard's artistic vision took was his experience of the fens of Lincolnshire. Here in the school holidays 'spent with professional wildfowlers (who became my second mother and father) at or near Fosdyke, Lincolnshire'[7] he learnt an alertness to nature, an awareness of changing sky and water, often experienced from a moving boat, which stayed with him all his life. In the year that he died he made a very small gouache (catalogue no. 77) specifically of a scene on the fens, in memory of and perhaps as a tribute to this early source of feeling and inspiration.

John Tunnard's schooling was conventional: at first Horton School, Ickwellbury, Bedfordshire, and then in the summer quarter of 1914 Charterhouse, where he won the Struan Robertson prize for drawing two years running. He left Charterhouse in the summer of 1918 and was fortunate enough to miss being called up in the First World War by one day.

In March 1919, some seven months after leaving school, we find Tunnard enrolled as a student at the Royal College of Art. He was a

7. Biographical note prepared by Tunnard himself c. 1959.

Catalogue no. 77
Punt gunning on the Wash 1971

student not of painting, but of design, at a time when important changes were taking place. Since 1901 the Royal College of Art had been divided into four schools, Architecture, Painting, Sculpture and Design. Since 1901 W. R. Lethaby, a great and influential thinker on the subject of Industrial Design, had been appointed Professor of Design but he handed over the post to a former pupil, E.W. Tristram, in 1919. In 1920 Sir William Rothenstein was appointed Principal, and under him the College flourished – particularly in the fine arts. It is conceivable that the change of aura from that of Lethaby, a designer, to that of Rothenstein, a painter, coming as it did at a sensitive and crucial stage in Tunnard's education, may have planted the seeds of his own later transformation from designer into painter.

Another fact of possible significance is that Henry Moore, who influenced and befriended Tunnard in the 30s, was a fellow student. Born in 1898, two years before Tunnard, Moore came to the Royal College two years after him and was soon esteemed by Rothenstein as 'the ablest student in the sculpture school.'[8]

One other aspect of Tunnard's life at the Royal College deserves mention. He developed a liking for traditional jazz and became the drummer of the London Students Jazz Band. He continued this activity as drummer (and organiser) of semi-professional bands during and probably throughout the 20s. The connections between modern art and music are legion. Tunnard was not perhaps so obviously influenced by jazz as Mondrian but, according to *Everybody's Weekly* of April 8th, 1939, 'Invariably Tunnard paints to an accompaniment of swing music – the hotter the record the better the inspiration flows.' Also we find musical notations and the shapes of musical instruments in some of his paintings (e.g. catalogue no. 22 *Transformation of red*) rather as we find such references in

8. William Rothenstein, *Since Fifty. Men and Memories* 1922–1938, page 38.

the work of the French cubist painters, and on occasion Ben Nicholson. More important, the idea of 'improvisation' in jazz has its counterpart in painting (or at least surrealist-influenced painting) with what Breton called 'psychic automatism', a form of which was undoubtedly practised by Tunnard.

Such parallels, partly technical in nature, cannot be pressed too close perhaps. In very general terms it remains relevant that Tunnard, by being a jazz musician in the 20s (and in his twenties) was something of a modern spirit, the sort of person to take to modern art when exposed to it more easily and naturally than many other English artists of the period, such as Stanley Spencer, Augustus John and even Paul Nash.

Tunnard left the Royal College with a diploma and an excellent reference from the Principal. He enjoyed telling[9] how most students spent their time in the Albert and Victoria Museum, but that he went to Bond Street, to see what design was really about. As a result he was the only student of his year from the design school to step straight into a job. He became a designer for Tootal Broadhurst Lee, in Manchester, for four years on a retainer fee.

In 1926 Tunnard married Mary Robertson who had been a fellow student at the Royal College. She was a great influence on and stimulus to him, and vice versa. They were later known to one pair of friends as 'the mental cocktail'. Mary 'Bob' Tunnard was not productive herself as an artist, but her sketchbooks indicate considerable promise and a delicate talent. Probably in the same year Tunnard left Tootals[10] and became art adviser to the carpet manufacturers H. & M. Southwell of Bridgenorth, remaining with them for two years. In 1928 he was made selector of woven and printed fabrics for John Lewis & Co., but in 1929 he gave up commercial work and became a painter. He earned his living at first (there is evidence that at one stage he received a legacy from an aunt, but ran through it) by teaching design at the Central School of Art.

9. Letter to the author from Michael Canney, December 27th, 1976.

10. The firm no longer has records of Tunnard's designs.

Caerleon 1933
Oil on canvas
W. T. Vint collection
Not in exhibition

Soon after his decision to be a painter, the Tunnards gave up their somewhat racketty existence in London and went on a five months' camping expedition to the Lizard pensinsula, the extreme southern area of Cornwall. They pitched their tent by a small river where it joins the sea at Caerleon, near Poltesco, a secluded and romantic spot given character by the crumbling walls and tower of an old serpentine mine. This according to Tunnard himself, was in about 1930. There is evidence that he spent at least part of 1931 and 1932 in the same vicinity. In 1931 the Tunnards' fixed abode was a small London studio in Bedford Park, 1a Queen Anne's Gardens, Chiswick, W.4.[11]

In 1931 three paintings, *Bargate Stone*, *Delft Donkey*, and *Sunday Morning, Chiswick*, were accepted by the Royal Academy. According to P. G. Konody in *The Observer*, this last painting, 'a glimpse through the obliquely placed framework of a window', was 'far removed from academic convention' yet 'soundly constructed and faultlessly coherent'. Konody actually bought this painting as well as praising it, but he died two years later and all three paintings remain untraced.

Later in 1931 Tunnard showed a painting entitled *Rocks* at the London Group. This too appears to be lost, but a contemporary review gives a description of it as 'gigantic group of rocks, seen from a peculiar point of view so that it gives a most powerful impression of something grotesque but alive'. Tunnard did not show again at the Royal Academy until 1960, but he showed with the London Group every year from 1931 until 1950, becoming a member in 1934.

Having begun to attract notice he was offered a show at the Redfern Gallery, scheduled to open in late April 1933. The majority of the thirty-one paintings catalogued were Cornish landscapes, romantic in feeling, mainly farm and coastal scenes, but interspersed with some still-lifes and a flower painting. Four were watercolours, the remainder were oils.

Many of the paintings of the early 30s that survive are not unnaturally beginner's efforts, clumsy in execution and without much originality of vision, but they tended to improve rapidly and in some of them we can see certain characteristics of his later work in embryo. There was the beginning of an interest in rhythm, both in the brushwork and in the repetition of the same motif (e.g. a gate) on different planes; an interest in odd viewpoints and double vistas; above all, perhaps, an interest in movement. Two paintings of harbours, *Mousehole* (catalogue no. 5), and *French boats at Newlyn* (catalogue no. 4), although tactful in colour show an almost expressionist verve in the manipulation of thick paint into a unified image.

In a cryptic biographical note composed in about 1959, Tunnard wrote, 'After this [the one-man show at the Redfern Gallery] decided to leave studio in London, went to Mitcham and bought a beautiful horse-drawn gipsy caravan and lived in it, in Cornwall near Cadgwith, on the Lizard pensinula. Rented half of a fisherman's

11. A photograph exists of a missing painting of about that date *Birds round the ash heap*, which was almost certainly painted in Bedford Park. The garden fence is typical of Bedford Park and the photograph of the painting is by a Bedford Park photographer.

Mousehole c. 1933

loft in Cadgwith and started with wife a hand-blocked printed silk business. At this period, began to paint in some sort of non-representational style (not true abstraction). In April 1939 was given first non-representational show at the Guggenheim Jeune, Cork Street.'

The question arises, and the answer to it helps to measure the climate of English art of the 30s: how did Tunnard, living in a remote fishing village in Cornwall,[12] manage to transform himself between 1934 and 1939, from a painter of fairly conventional aims into a fully-fledged modern artist whose work attracted the attention of Alfred Barr of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, among others?

There is just enough solid evidence to give the framework of a reasonably coherent answer to this question, although the following interpretation of events is partly hypothetical.

Tunnard does not seem to have done much painting between 1934 and 1936. The sales from the Redfern show, some seven paintings, had not been greatly encouraging. The move from London and setting up the hand-blocked printed silk business (an important source of future income) no doubt took time and effort. Also, Tunnard must have been made aware that the language of art was

12. He never went to Paris or anywhere else on the Continent, except for one visit to Majorca in 1935.

changing. England had begun to break out of the insularity and conservatism that the aftermath of the war had engendered. In the 20s, even the art world scarcely noticed the emergence of *Ray* edited by Sydney Hunt in 1926/1927 and almost certainly the most avant-garde magazine concerning art since Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*. But in the early 30s Henry Moore was beginning to be a big name, Nicholson and Hepworth met Brancusi, Picasso, Mondrian and Hélion and visited Arp's studio. In 1933 the Mayor Gallery gave Miró his first one-man show in London. Paul Nash founded Unit One and Herbert Read published his highly influential *Art Now*, in the revised edition of which a reproduction of a Tunnard was to appear. When *Unit One*, the book to follow the exhibition, appeared next year edited by Read, Osbert Lancaster reviewing it opined that, 'the piping of the Read has drowned the tolling of the Bell'. Bloomsbury was in decline. In 1934 also came the *Objective Abstractions* exhibition at the Zwemmer Gallery and the first Paul Klee exhibition at the Mayor Gallery, of which Geoffrey Grigson wrote – 'at last, for the tantalising half-tone approximations of the *Junge Kunst* and *Peintres Nouveaux* pamphlets, we can substitute the living fantasies of Klee . . .' Just to be influenced by Klee at that period in England was to be ahead of one's time. Grigson also wrote a wide-ranging chapter on painting and sculpture in the *The Arts Today*[13] which was definitely in Tunnard's library by 1936, the year after it came out. The eight illustrations are of Moore, Klee, Miró, Hélion, Lewis, Wood, Nicholson and Hepworth.

'Bob' Tunnard in front of the gypsy caravan in Cornwall c. 1933

In 1935 the Seven and Five Society went abstract and Gabo came to England. It is certain that later Gabo went to see Tunnard in Cornwall. Also in 1935 *A Short Survey Surrealism* by David Gascoyne was published and *Axis* began to appear (followed by *Circle*[14] in 1937 and *The London Bulletin* in 1938) illustrating the work of most of the artists that probably influenced Tunnard, including that of Alexander Calder. In the same year Tunnard himself went with his wife to Majorca which may have prepared the ground for the seeds of Miró's influence to take root. In the following year, the exhibition *Abstract and Concrete*, organised by Nicolette Gray, was shown in and outside London. Overshadowing this in terms of notoriety came the highly important *International Surrealist Exhibition* in the summer of 1936. In later years Tunnard is reputed on the authority of Michael Canney to have been greatly attached to his copy of the book *Surrealism* (edited by Herbert Read), which his wife gave him for Christmas 1936 and to have pointed to it with the words, 'It's all in there; it's all in there.'

We cannot be sure of exactly what exhibitions Tunnard saw, what books and articles he read, or the precise nature of his contacts with other artists. His approach to painting, though highly intelligent, was not primarily intellectual but he was no doubt helped by the fact that the world of modern art in England in the 30s was

13. *The Arts Today* edited, with an introduction, by Geoffrey Grigson, London. John and the Bodley Head, 1935.

14. Tunnard acquired *Circle* in 1939.

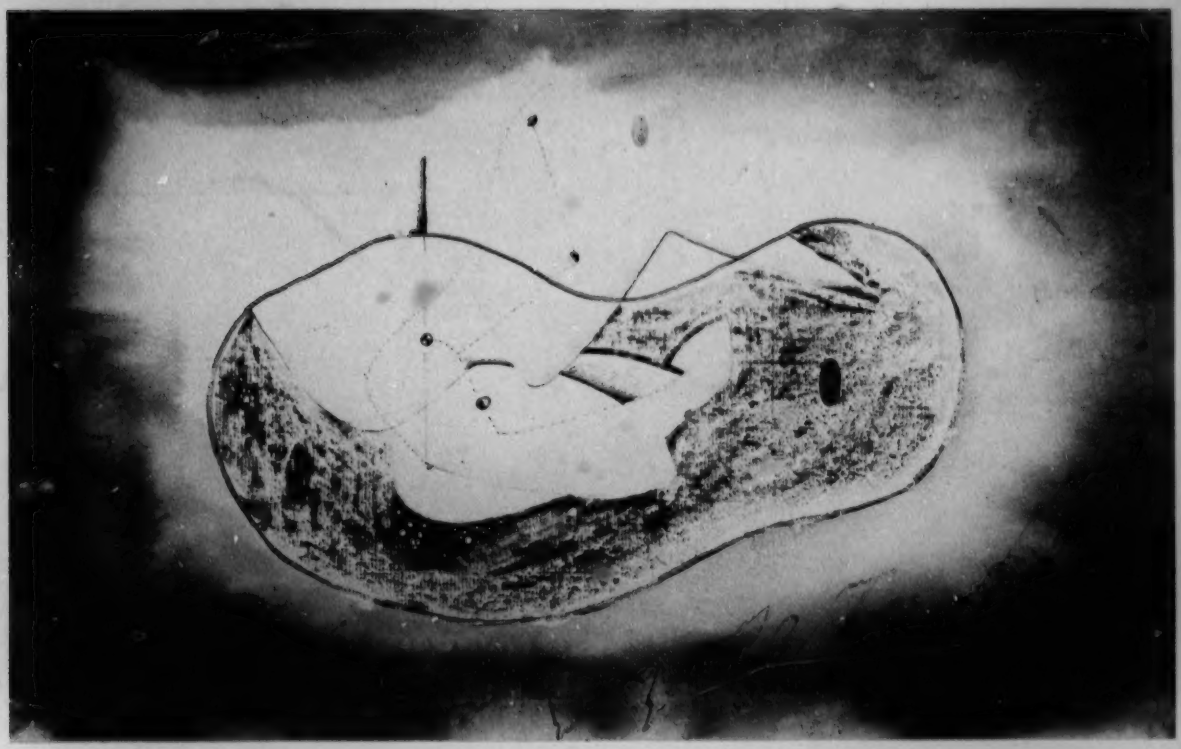
very small. For example, very few galleries were involved. He had an entrée into this world and his work shows that he somehow managed to keep abreast of events. He seems to have caught on to the languages of abstraction, constructivism and surrealism almost instinctively, while remaining much less a deliberate copier of continental masters than, say, Gorky, whose personal and mature style did not develop until very late. Tunnard's experience as a textile designer, of course, would have helped him to think in a non-figurative way, and as a design student rather than a painting student he was probably less fettered by the whole history of art. In this, perhaps, he is rather like the American painters of his generation.

Tunnard's own account of the transformation of his work, given in an interview[15] of April 1944, is uncomplicated, even deceptively clear and simple. It describes the pressure for change exerted by the natural evolution of his own work, although he later acknowledges the *example* of Mondrian, and the influence of 'other abstract painters who were older than I' and of Miró and Klee, especially for their technique.

'I started certainly as a representational painter and moved through various phases of representationalism. First, I suppose, I was interested in merely trying to put down what I saw or thought I saw. Then, after that, I was more interested in the dramatic content of the landscape or whatever it was that I was painting, and then, more particularly, not so much with the literary dramatic content but with the geometrically dramatic content. By that I mean the dramatic movements of roads, of ruts sweeping into farmyards, of the lines of telegraph poles or the sweep of railings, and these I found myself exaggerating to get the geometrically dramatic. Of course, I got to the stage when, confronted with a landscape, I felt that I could not be bound by the things that I saw, and naturally the only thing to do was to invent. As soon as I started inventing I found that it was so much more exciting, and that inventing came gradually into what is called non-representational painting.'

The first extant 'non-representational' Tunnard, in fact the only painting certainly executed in 1935, is the water-colour *Two birds, one pebble, one boulder* (catalogue no. 8). It is perhaps a key work. It shows the attempt to present an abstraction from natural forms, an interest in the idea matamorphosis and a sort of playfulness, thereby overlapping at least with the works of Paul Klee and of Henry Moore's drawings and sculpture of the early 30s. In 1936 the influence of Klee and Miró is more marked *Port and starboard* 1936 and *Abstract* 1936 (catalogue nos. 9 and 10). In certain paintings of 1937, executed with great panache, Tunnard is almost under the skin of Miró. A letter from Henry Moore to Tunnard of April 28th, 1937, shows that he is taken seriously by the leading English artist of his generation and he was proud of this. In April/May of that year he

15. Interview with Myerscough Walker in April 1944.



Two birds, one pebble, one boulder 1935

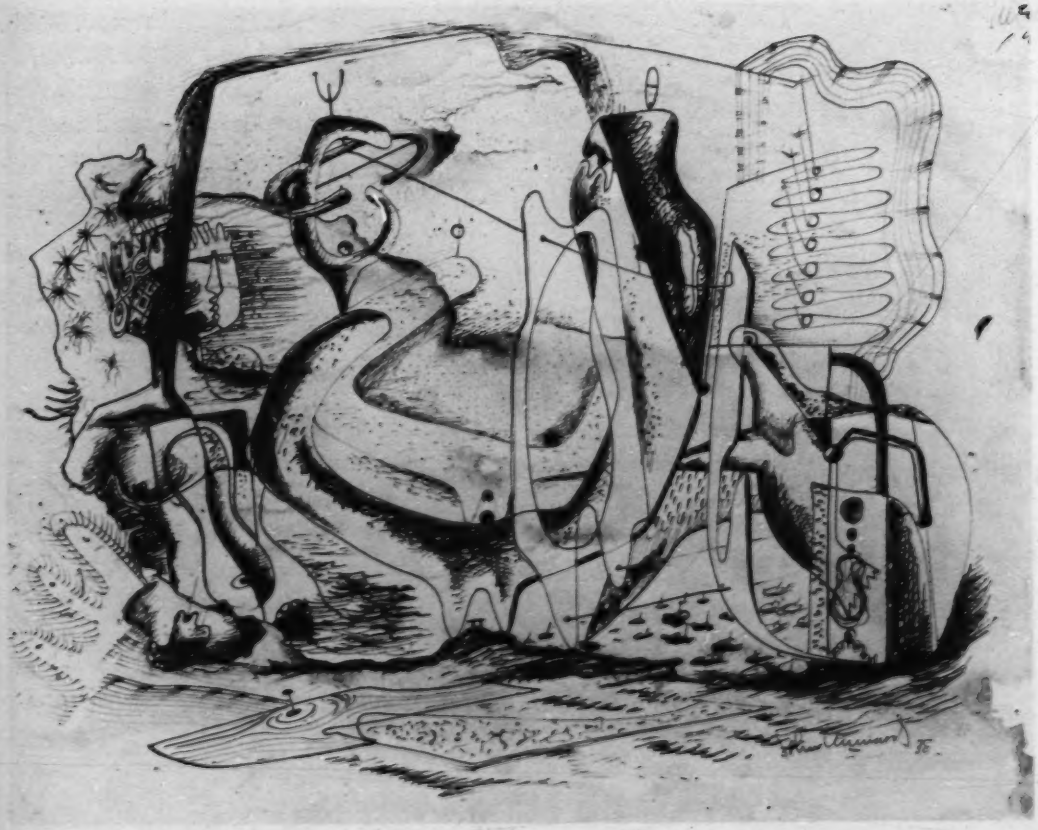
exhibited in the Surrealist section of an exhibition at the A.I.A. Gallery. At about this time he also showed[16] with Moore, Nash, Klee, Roland Penrose and others in the exhibition, *Surrealism*, at Cambridge.

By 1938 he was beginning to be prolific again. He was still absorbing influences but a confident synthesis was emerging. For example, although the ink and wash drawing *Clifftop structures* (catalogue no. 17) is reminiscent in some ways of other surrealist drawings of the period (and in particular perhaps of Cecil Collins's *Angel images and negative spectres in conflict* 1933, illustrated in *Surrealism*,[17] plate 21) it is also sharply Tunnardian in feeling and effect, and in its vocabulary of forms. The wooden rudder shape on the cliff top, the little boats in the distance, the bird shape, the waving vestiges of a musical score, the letters of the Greek alphabet π, θ, φ (incidentally the titles of some of his other paintings of the period); all these are typical Tunnard, even if the other shapes seem to have been borrowed from either Constructivism or Surrealist sculpture.

By 1938/39 his paintings indicate a great leap forward in many ways. He had evolved a sound and personal technique not only in large and small gouaches but also in oil and tempera paintings on gesso. Like Ben Nicholson he would often draw into the surface leaving a white gesso line, as in *Transformation of red* (catalogue no. 22) but, unlike Nicholson, Tunnard's actual surfaces are incredibly smooth. The illusion of coruscations and texture (he was known, according to one of his ex-students at the Central School, as

16. I have not been able to establish the exact date of the Cambridge exhibition but a list of some of the artists he showed with is in the Chronology, page 43.

17. *Surrealism*, 1936, edited by Herbert Read.

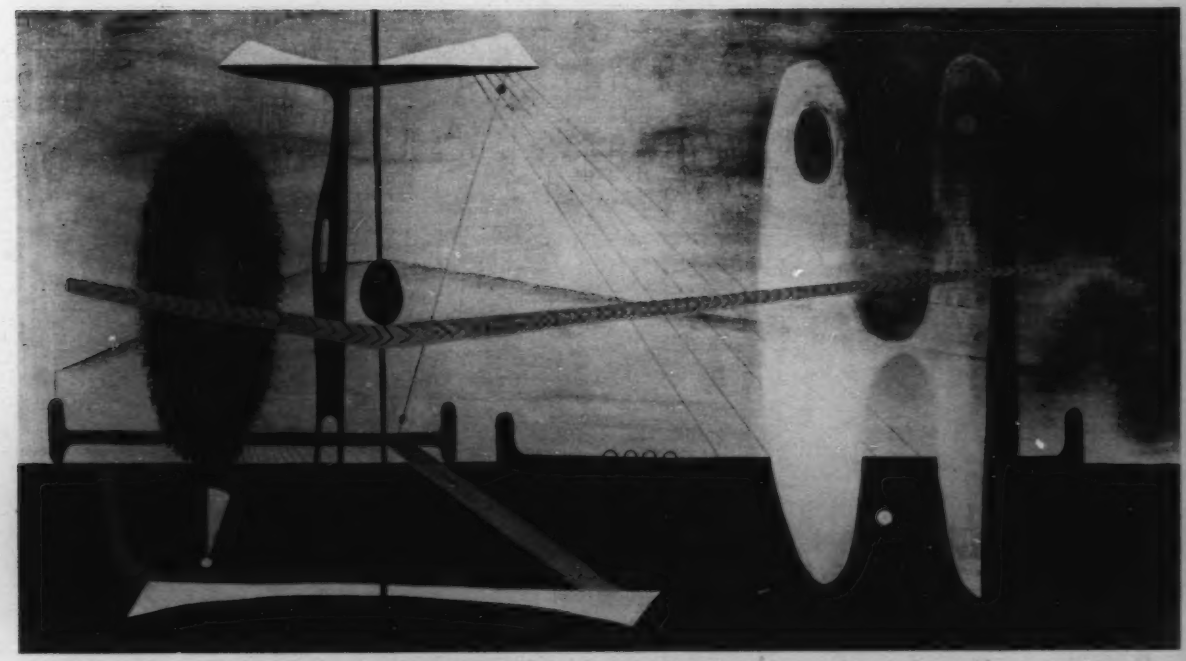


Top left
Bird 1937

Bottom left
Clifftop structures 1938

'texture Tunnard') amounts to trompe l'oeil. Another difference between the two artists is that Nicholson tended to explore effects of shallow space, a legacy of Cubism, whereas Tunnard was always attracted towards the exploration of illusory (and later almost infinite) space, an exploration legitimised and indeed encouraged by Surrealism (e.g. *Fulcrum*, 1939 catalogue no. 18).

Also at this period another element in Tunnard's imaginative synthesis becomes obvious. It is partly related to the Constructivist movement and partly related to the sculpture of Alexander Calder.



Fulcrum 1939

Calder is reputed to have said that he wished to make 'moving Mondrians'. Tunnard, who seemed to like to use modern sculpture as subject matter, now made something resembling two-dimensional Calders. A reviewer[18] of 1939 even referred to him as 'the Heath Robinson of the Constructivist movement'. The beautifully if improbably balanced forms of *Psi* (illustrated page 27) shows what he means. Propellors and rudders joined by lines, like string crop up often at this period and in *Painting no. 1*, 1939 (catalogue no. 19) there is a curious invention, half insect, half helicopter, which seems to relate both to Heath Robinson and the surrealist fascination with machines and metamorphosis (detail illustrated overleaf). Tunnard was well placed with his knowledge of natural history to discern similarities between insects and machines.

Tunnard met Peggy Guggenheim in 1938 and she records the event in *Confessions of an Art Addict*, 'One day a marvellous man in a highly elaborate tweed coat walked into the gallery. He looked like Groucho Marx. He was as animated as a jazz band leader, which he turned out to be. He showed us his gouaches, which were as

18. In *The Observer* reviewing his Guggenheim Jeune exhibition, March 1939.

Painting no. 1 1939
Detail

musical as Kandinsky's, as delicate as Klee's, and as gay as Miró's. His colour was exquisite and his construction magnificent. His name was John Tunnard. He asked me very modestly if I thought I could give him a show, and then and there I fixed a date. (Later, he told me he couldn't believe his good luck, he was so used to being turned down.) During this exhibition, which was a great success from every point of view, a woman came into the gallery and asked, "Who is this John Tunnard?" Turning three somersaults, Tunnard, who was in the gallery, landed at this lady's feet, saying, "I am John Tunnard." At the end of the show I, amongst many others, bought an oil painting with the extraordinary title *PSI* in green letters. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, admired it so much when he saw it years later that he wanted to buy it for the Museum, but I would not part with it and he had to find another one instead.'

A fuller picture of John Tunnard is given by Julian Trevelyan, writing in the *London Bulletin*, no. 12, March 1939, which also printed a catalogue of his Guggenheim Jeune exhibition:

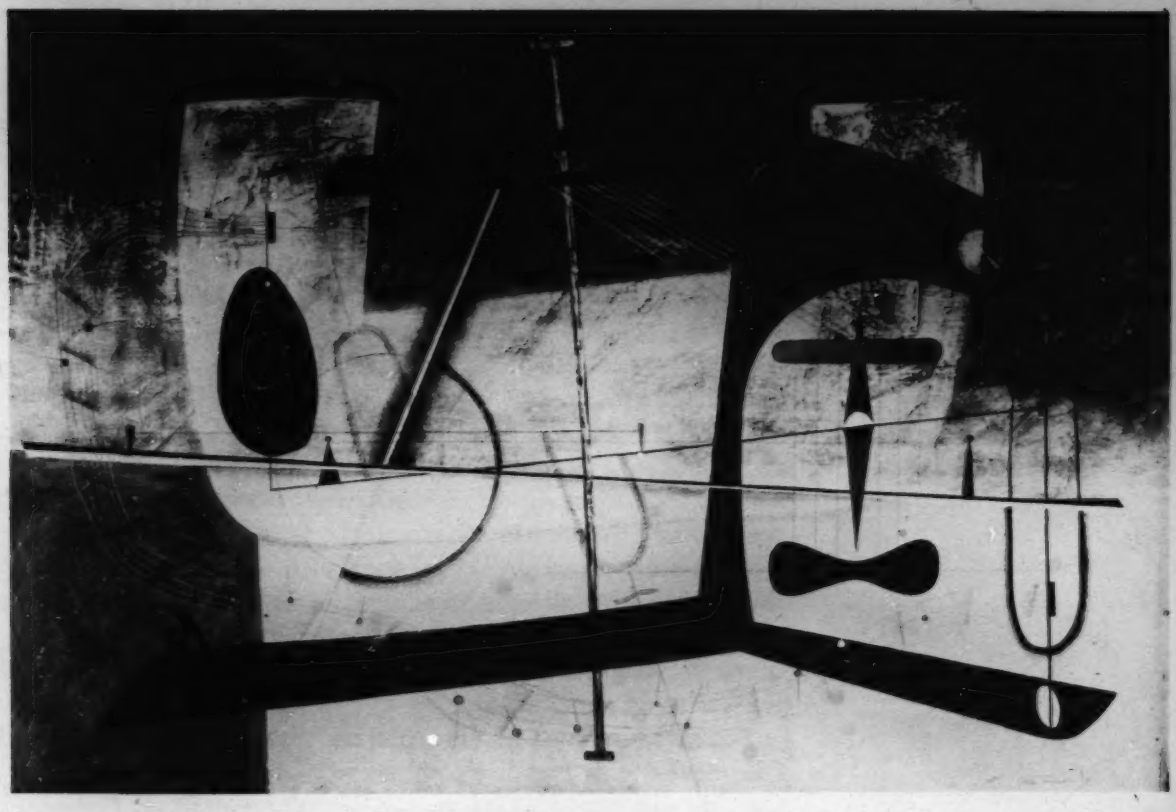
Who is John Tunnard?

Why, he's the man with the loud check coat. You must have seen him, the man who always wears a shocking pink tie, and with a face that's a mixture between a fox's and a giant panda's. The man who laughs like a jackal so that you hear him two blocks away. Don't tell me you haven't heard him. The man who is always talking about shipwrecks and pirates. They say he lives in Cornwall where he undermines the morals of the older fishermen; he turns them into jitterbugs. Once he ran a jazz band of his own until they couldn't hold him down any longer. So now it's fishermen, lobsters, darts, shell-fish, beer and an occasional tourist that he picks up sketching among the old hulks where the sewer runs into the bay, or a poet asleep on the top of the cliffs. That's John Tunnard at home...

But what does he do?

Talk, chiefly. Don't believe them when they tell you he paints. It's simply not true, and I am in unique position to tell you why. It's all done for him by an army of insects. Five hundred spiders, twenty ship-worms, seventy-five beetles, quite a few exotic caterpillars, a hard-worked slug, and a Bol-Weevil. I've seen them at work.

First Tunnard walks along the seashore till he spots an old ship's timber, a cast-off ironing board, a washed up chart, an unfinished lavatory seat. To see him returning from one of these expeditions is to mistake him for a submarine junk shop. Next he turns his spiders to work on them. Delicate webs are spun, while the slug ambles around leaving his silvery trail behind him. Now it is the turn for the shipworms and the Weevil who scour the surface into the most intriguing patinations, while the beetles lay globular eggs in appropriate positions. Any other delicacies that you may notice in the finished product are probably the work of the exotic caterpillars. I can't say for certain. Finally it all goes into a sort of glass box on the wall.



Psi 1938
Peggy Guggenheim collection
Not in exhibition

Another thing Tunnard does is to make musical instruments, but musical instruments that won't make a sound! They are tightly strung with delicate wires in red and blue; sometimes one of the strings lies broken and wiggly across the whole works. Occasionally he even leaves a bow beside to tempt the meddlesome amateur and then shuts it all away in a glass box, so that the music can only be apprehended with the eye. And to my mind music, like children, should be seen and not heard.

You aren't going to tell me that Tunnard is one of those frightful Surrealists or those people who put a square in the middle of an empty canvass and call it *Composition*?

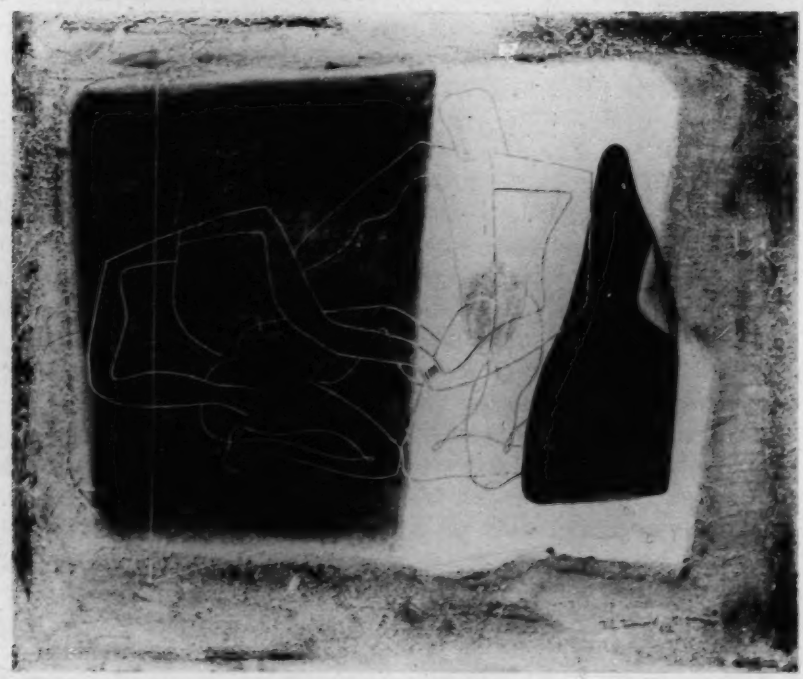
No, you idiot, I told you already Tunnard is not a painter – never was one – even if you do see his name printed in the catalogue of the London Group. Tunnard's a hot-jazz king, Tunnard's a good cook, Tunnard's the man who talks outside the performing fleas, Tunnard's a husband, Tunnard's a scream. When you confront him with one of the objects in his glass boxes he goes all queer and jumps about saying 'Oh! it's just a little idea I had when the roof fell in.' If you like it he says 'Don't be silly, don't be silly,' till you could hit him. If you want to buy it he jumps into the great fifty h.p. Hispano-Suiza that he stole from his aunt, and rushes away. That's Tunnard all over.

I think I should like to meet Tunnard.

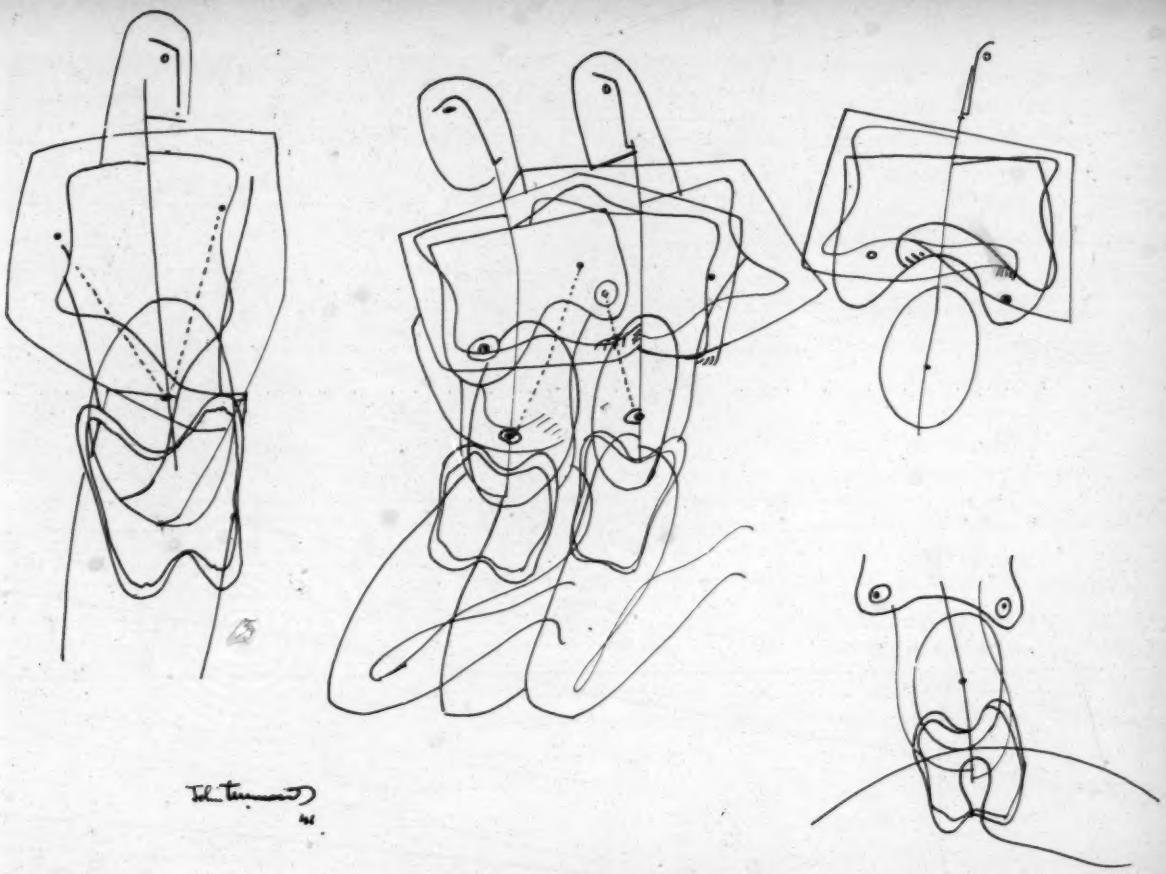
And how! But since you can't do that you had better make the best of the glass boxes, the caterpillars, and the violins that play tunes on your spectacles. They are better than anything else you are likely to see in London.

1940–45 During the war Tunnard was kept extremely active. Not only was he a coastguard from 1940 until the end but also he and his wife kept their hand-blocked silk industry going from the fisherman's loft in Cadgwith, charging one coupon for each scarf in 1941. They also bred rabbits for food and pelts as part of the war effort and their own struggle for survival. Meanwhile cultural life and its demands from artists of all sorts went on and indeed was intensified in some ways. C.E.M.A. was formed and showed his work in Ipswich, Rugby and elsewhere. Trevor Thomas, Director of the Leicester Museum, came to Cadgwith to see Tunnard and included him in his *New Movements in Art* exhibition 1942. The dealers in London kept going and the Redfern, Zwemmer, Alex Reid and Lefevre Galleries showed his work as did Nierendorf in New York two years after a show at the American British Art Centre. The British Council showed his work in Australia, South America and France. In London there were a number of surveys, at the London Museum and elsewhere. Some had an ideological slant, such as the *For Liberty* exhibition at the A.I.A. Gallery in March 1943, in the bombed-out basement of John Lewis in Oxford Street, and an exhibition at Erno Goldfinger's house in Hampstead in 1942 on behalf of the 'Aid to Russia' fund of the National Council of Labour.

Tunnard was now a mature artist and his work during this period falls into roughly two overlapping categories. First there are drawings and paintings of or incorporating the human form. They show for the first time in a study of the human figure which is literally drawn in black and white line with beautiful precision onto or into the painted surface. There is an investigation both of anatomy and it



Man, woman and flag 1942



Study of nudes 1941

seems of the mysterious relationship between man and woman, e.g. *Study of nudes* 1941 (catalogue no. 31) and *Man, woman and flag* 1942 (catalogue no. 32). The influence of Henry Moore is discernible and may be partly responsible for this humanistic phase. Possibly also it

Over the hills 1942

Forecast (097) 1945

was the fruit of introspection caused by the recurrence of war. The paintings of the early 40s, such as *Over the hills* 1942 (catalogue no. 36) are very beautiful and restrained in colour. By the end of 1942 the figures have disappeared or have been replaced by symbols and Tunnard's inventions which relate to the world of technology have taken over. Semi-transparent forms and planes, reminiscent of Gabo, gather and intersect. Clearly too the experience of gazing at sea and sky as a coastguard has had a profound effect. The surrealists believed in foresight as well as in searching the past and Tunnard believed that he had the gift to foresee technological shapes in his paintings before they appeared in reality, a theme which is explored not only by Thwaites, but by Michael Canney in an article entitled *Science and the Artist* in *Discovery*, December 1959. An outstanding painting of 1945 is entitled *Forecast*. Another of that year is called *Presage*. A commissioned painting of 1944 *Circle* Φ (catalogue no. 42) on the other hand, which is typically precise in its drawing, is based on an actual engineering project in the fens and contains such motifs as the chart-maker's symbol for low water.

1946–59 Tunnard's life after the war suffered a number of disruptions. To begin with he had financial difficulties. He no longer enjoyed his coastguard's salary and in a letter of June 1947 to Duncan Macdonald of the Alex Reid and Lefevre Gallery he describes himself as 'on the rocks'. Since 1944 he had tried very hard to get a satisfactory teaching post at a number of places, such as Dartington Hall in Devon, in London and Edinburgh. At last in 1946 he became the art master at Wellington College. According to Alexander Dunbar, a pupil, he had the effect of 'a breath of fresh air'. Painting suddenly became fun. There was no more peering studiously at drab still-lifes. He encouraged 'a sense of "the cream bun"'. Unfortunately the new life did not really suit the Tunnards and in less than a year they were back in Cornwall. In 1947 they sold their little thatched cottage in Cadgwith and rented a granite house on the highest hill in West Cornwall 827 feet above the Atlantic on the moors. In 1948 Tunnard secured a post as teacher of design at Penzance into which he threw his enthusiasm and his considerable technical knowledge of dyeing, weaving and printing. Nevertheless life was not very settled. The last exhibition at Alex Reid and Lefevre had not been as successful as anticipated. The Tunnards even considered emigrating to British Columbia in 1950. At about this time, too, Tunnard's mother died and he inherited enough money to make earning a living no longer a practical necessity.

Zawn 1949

The return 1951

In 1953 the Tunnards moved to Trethinick, Lamorna. Michael Canney pictures them there as follows:

> After leaving Morvah they chose Dame Laura Knight's old studio at Lamorna which was also surrounded by an impenetrable jungle. They were keen gardeners – keen to show the garden but opposed to droppers-in. When they gave parties, which were legendary, they went on until six in the morning. The old art student days still lingered on. Hospitality was generous, excellent and copious drink and food. John did brilliant soft-shoe dances with bowler hat for the assembled guests, in fact he must have been one of the few remaining experts in this genre! There was a strong touch of the music hall in his character, like Sickert whom Bob Tunnard studied under.
>
> They had great charm, and were quite unique, a product of a more leisurely age that was electrified by the twenties and thirties, the jazz age, Dada, 'Art Deco' and the 'Moderne'. Their studio and house was possibly Syrie Maugham, certainly white and gold leaf, part fairground baroque (ornate mirrors, painted carved wood, Staffordshire figures and Bohemian glass), with hints of Fortnum and Mason, General Trading Company, Army and Navy, and Italian chic.

Sea flower 1955

After the war and throughout the 50s, Tunnard's paintings tend to include more representational elements, to come down to earth as it were or at least to paraphrase landscapes more legibly. Rocks, plants, driftwood, nets and the general settings of Cornish inlets or zawns (e.g. catalogue no. 52) are depicted. These are often mixed with sort of abstract sculptures in contorted shapes reflecting perhaps the anxiety that pervaded much post-war art. (There is also a series of paintings of technical interest as they are painted on glass[19] 1946–47). In 1951 he painted a mural for a restaurant at the Festival of Britain and contributed an unusual and disturbing painting *The return* (catalogue no. 55) for the Arts Council exhibition *60 Paintings for 51*.

Other aspects of his long-standing interest in nature also come to the surface in the 50s, such as bones, birds, insects and, in 1955, underwater plants and creatures, as in *Sea flower* 1955 (catalogue no. 57) inspired by an American documentary film about life under the ocean, which he saw in the local cinema. He was less prolific at this period than previously but there are some very good and little-known individual paintings such as *Herons*, circa 1950 (catalogue no. 54) and *Morvah* 1951 and *Stone and bone* 1955 (catalogue no. 56).

19. The idea of painting on glass was suggested to Tunnard by Robin McDouall.

1960–71 In the last decade of his life he became more prolific and with *Impasse* 1960 (catalogue no. 62). Tunnard seems to have recovered and in some ways extended his vision of the 40s. The surrealist interest in endless space turns into a fascination with outer space, e.g. *Messenger* 1969 (catalogue no. 75, p.35) not perhaps unnaturally in the decade that saw the first moon landings.

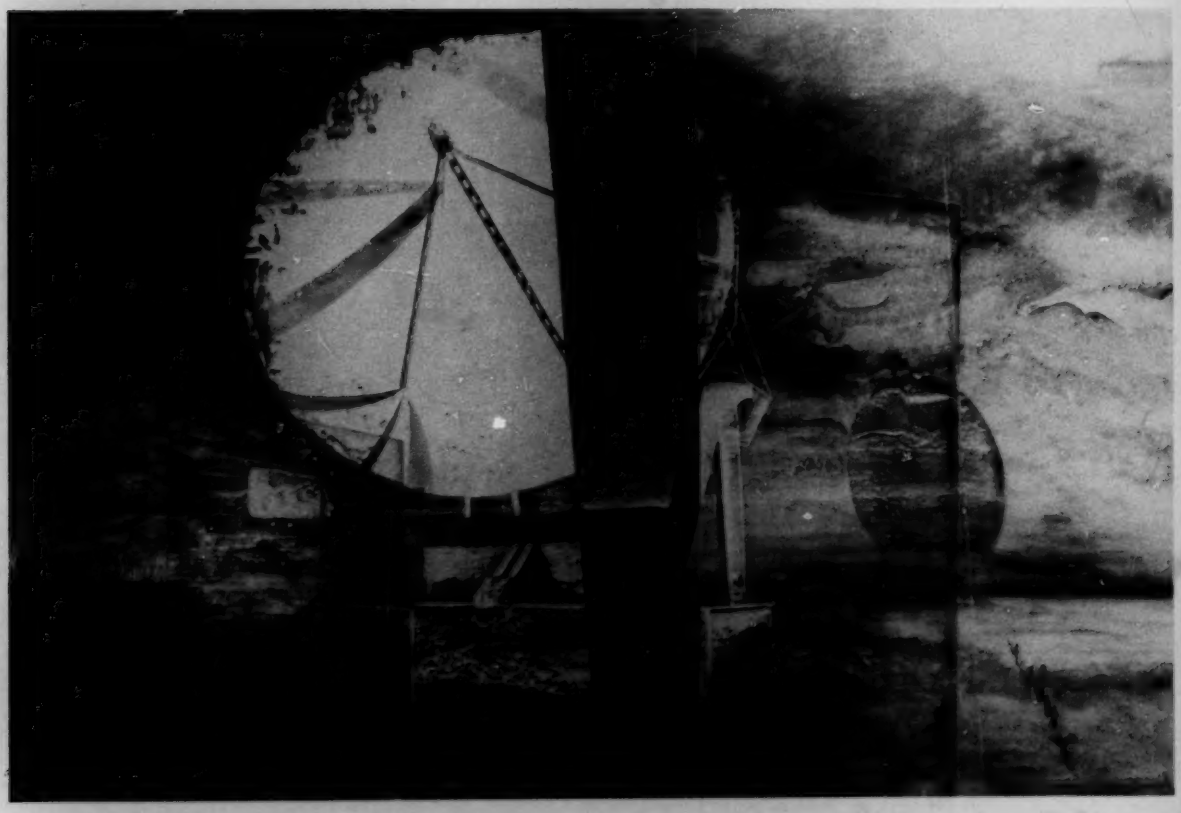
As late as 1966 Tunnard painted some of the largest oils of his life, such as the impressive *Vision* 1966 (catalogue no. 71), but most

Impasse 1960

Flurry 1963

paintings of this period are in gouache, a medium which he completely mastered. Among outstanding gouaches is *Flurry* 1963 (catalogue no. 69) in which a swiftly rendered image of birds is brilliantly and completely integrated into the painting as a whole. He seems to have broken through to a new fluency and freedom at this stage, although the images are often complex and do not always translate well into black and white reproductions.

Messenger 1969



We have seen that although he was geographically isolated (and incidentally not one to mix with other artists[20] in Cornwall at least) Tunnard was spiritually in tune with the modern movement. Within that movement, in the last analysis, he defies a simple label.

Fundamentally perhaps he was an English Romantic whose imagination combined modern art, technology, personal experience and knowledge of nature, in order to create a world of its own in which John Tunnard could be free to play and to invent. His work, judging by the collectors of it, is of interest not only to those who have learnt the language of modern art but also appeals to the informed imagination of scientists and engineers.

20. He was friendly however with such artists as Julian Trevelyan, Charles Howard and John Banting.

Catalogue

The catalogue is arranged in chronological order. All oil paintings are on board unless otherwise stated. Dimensions are given in centimetres, height preceding width. L indicates exhibited only at the Royal Academy.

1
Harbour 1932
Gouache 35.5 × 44.3
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

2
The window ledge 1933
Oil on canvas 56 × 76
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

3
Red mullet 1933
Oil on canvas 51 × 61
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

4 L
French boats at Newlyn 1933
Oil 39.3 × 41.8
Lent by Mrs Kathleen Moorhouse

5
Mousehole *c.* 1933 *illustrated page 20*
Oil 40.5 × 49.8
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

6
The farm pond 1933 *illustrated page 15*
Watercolour 36 × 54
Lent by Cartwright Hall, Bradford Art Galleries and Museums

7
Near Poltesco 1933
Gouache 38 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

8
Two birds, one pebble, one boulder 1935
illustrated page 23
Pen, ink and watercolour 26.8 × 43.8
Lent by the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

9
Port and starboard 1936
Oil 26 × 75
Lent by Mr & Mrs R. B. Lintell of Guernsey

10
Abstract 1936
Oil 45.5 × 61
Lent by Julian Trevelyan

11
Yellow balance 1937
Oil 47 × 57
Lent by Mr & Mrs R. B. Lintell of Guernsey

12
Untitled 1937
Ink, crayon and gouache 25.5 × 37.6
Lent by Anthony d'Offay

13
Bird 1937 *illustrated page 24*
Ink, crayon and watercolour 25.5 × 34.3
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

14
Flag 1937
Ink, crayon and watercolour 24.3 × 36.8
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

15
Untitled (grey background) 1937
Gouache 26.1 × 38
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

16
Untitled 1938
Gouache 26.1 × 37
Lent by James MacGibbon

17
Clifftop structures 1938 *illustrated page 24*
Ink and wash 33 × 43
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

18
Fulcrum 1939 *illustrated page 25*
Oil 44.3 × 81.5
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

19
Painting no. 1 1939 *detail illustrated page 26*
Oil 91.5 × 124.5
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

20
Theta 1939
Oil 78.5 × 102.8
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

21
Red and black balance 1939
Oil 30 × 75
Lent by Mr & Mrs R. B. Lintell of Guernsey

22
Transformation of red 1939 *illustrated on cover*
Oil 30.5 × 66
Lent by Antonia White

23
Xmas '39
Watercolour 9 × 13
Lent by Mr & Mrs R. B. Lintell of Guernsey

24
Device 1939
Gouache 38.1 × 55.2
Lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum

25
Composition 1939 *illustrated on frontispiece*
Gouache 73.5 × 54.8
Private Collection

26
Installation a 1939
Oil 76 × 122
Lent by Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
(Tyne & Wear Museums Service)

27
Man and woman 1940
Oil 36.1 × 36.1
Lent by Mr & Mrs Ian Stoutzker

28
Fugue 1940
Oil
Lent by Mr & Mrs R. B. Lintell of Guernsey

29
The kestrel's egg 1941
Oil 49.1 × 59.1
Private collection

30
Two nudes 1941
Oil 61 × 43
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

31
Study of nudes 1941 *illustrated page 29*
Ink 25.5 × 38.6
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

32
Man, woman and flag 1942 *illustrated page 28*
Oil 45.5 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

33
Oblique noon 1942
Oil 40.5 × 59.1
Lent by Lady Penrose

34
Metamorphis 1942
Oil 61 × 91.5
Lent by Leicester Museums and Art Galleries

35
Man, woman and iron 1942
Oil 51 × 61
Lent by Peter Dunican CBE

36
Over the hills 1942 *illustrated page 29*
Oil 31.1 × 43
Lent by Sir Ove Arup CBE

37
Oblique ending 1942
Watercolour
Lent by Manchester City Art Gallery

38
Cornwall 1942
Oil 45.2 × 65.9
Lent from the Arts Council Collection

39
Focus 1943
Ink and gouache 38 × 70.5
Lent by Anthony d'Offay

40
Poise 1944
Oil 41.8 × 58
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

41
Fish's window 1944
Gouache 35.5 × 56
Lent by Sir David Scott

42
Circle Φ 1942
Oil 50.1 × 74.8
Lent by Professor A. W. Skempton FRS

43
Ghost 1944
Gouache
Lent by Mr & Mrs R. B. Lintell of Guernsey

44
Cormorant 1944
Oil 36.8 × 51
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

45
Forecast (097) 1945 *illustrated page 30*
Oil 58.5 × 56
Lent by Sir David Scott

46
Fish, bird and stone 1946
Oil 23 × 28
Lent by Mr & Mrs Rudolph Glossop

47
Nimbus 1946
Gouache 34.3 × 53.5
Lent by Sir David Scott

48
Woman on the sea 1947
Ink and wash 25 × 35.5
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

49 L
Anthelion 1947
Oil on glass 24 × 44.4
Lent by Robin McDouall

50
The Levant Zawn 1947
Oil 102 × 78.1
Lent by the British Council

51
Western approaches 1947
Gouache 38 × 53.5
Lent by Mr & Mrs Rudolph Glossop

52
Zawn 1949 *illustrated page 31*
Gouache 36.8 × 54.8
Lent by the Gloucester Corporation

53
Nightjar and carrion crow 1950
Gouache 38 × 53.5
Lent by Mr & Mrs Rudolph Glossop

54
Herons 1950
Gouache 38 × 53.5
Lent by Mr & Mrs Rudolph Glossop

55
The return 1951 *illustrated page 32*
Oil 112 × 150
Lent by Peter Tunnard and Anthony d'Offay

56
Morvah 1951
Gouache 26.1 × 36.8
Lent by Peter Tunnard

57
Sea flower 1955 *illustrated page 33*
Gouache 26.8 × 36.8
Lent by Mrs Charles Wrinch

58
Journey 1955
Gouache 35 × 53.5
Lent by Jane Davis

59
Blue moon 1958
Gouache 38 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

60
Intersection 1958
Gouache 38 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

61
Self-portrait 1959
Oil 61 × 91.5
Lent by Stephen and Julia Watling

62
Impasse 1960 *illustrated page 34*
Oil 82.8 × 75.5
Lent by Jane Davis

63
Beacon 1960
Oil 54.1 × 51.6
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

64
Π 1960
Gouache 36.8 × 56.8
Lent by Neil G. Treseder

65 L
False dawn 1960
Gouache 36.8 × 56.8
Lent by Mrs Marguerite Martindale

66
Landscape with yellow and black orbs *c.* 1960
Gouache 38 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

67
Mirage III 1962
Gouache 38 × 51
Lent by Mr & Mrs Rudolph Glossop

68 L
Untitled (fishes) 1963
Gouache 36.8 × 53.5
Lent by Mrs Marguerite Martindale

69
Flurry 1963 *illustrated page 35*
Gouache 36 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

70
Marsh 1963
Gouache 38 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

71
Vision 1966
Oil 120.8 × 181.8
Lent by the National Research Development Corporation

72
In many moons 1966
Oil 152.5 × 122
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

73
Ice rocks *c.* 1966
Gouache 38 × 56
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

74
Display 1967
Oil 122 × 183
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

75
Messenger 1969 *illustrated page 35*
Oil 119.5 × 183
Lent from the Tunnard Estate

76
Vision of moon craters 1969
Gouache 38 × 45
Private collection

77 L
Punt gunning on the Wash 1971
illustrated page 17
Gouache 28 × 38
Private collection

78 L
Bushmen and animals
(Silk) Chiffon scarf 58.5 × 58.5
Lent by Mrs R. Glossop

79 L
Lords and ladies
(Silk) Crepe de Chine scarf 53.5 × 53.5
Lent by Mrs R. Glossop

80 L
Shore birds
(Silk) Crepe de Chine scarf 53.5 × 53.5
Lent by Mrs R. Glossop

81 L
Abstract design
(Silk) Chiffon scarf 71 × 71
Lent by Mrs R. Glossop

82 L
Repetive geometrical design
(Silk) Crepe de Chine scarf 53.5 × 53.5
Lent by Mrs R. Glossop

83 L
Design based on the word AMOR
(Wool) Scarf 91.5 × 91.5
Lent by Miss Emma C. Glossop

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Victoria and Albert Museum
Mrs Charles Wrinch
Stephen and Julia Watling
Antonia White

Chronology

1900	Born May 17th, Caesar's Camp, Sandy, Bedfordshire, only child of J. C. Tunnard of Frampton-by-Boston, Lincolnshire, a sporting painter and country gentleman.
c. 1908–13	Horton School, Ickwellbury, Bedfordshire.
1914–18	Charterhouse. Won Struan Robertson prize for drawing 2 years running. Spent holidays with wildfowlers in Lincolnshire.
1919–23	Student of design at Royal College of Art gaining diploma in design. Drummer in the London Students Jazz Band. Played in and organised semi-professional jazz bands in the 20s.
1923	Became designer for Tootal Broadhurst Lee, Manchester; on a retainer fee for about 4 years.
1926	Married Mary ('Bob') Robertson ARCA. Became art adviser to H. & M. Southwell of Bridgnorth (carpet manufacturers)
1928	Became selector of woven and printed fabrics for John Lewis and Co.
1929	Gave up commercial work and started painting. Became part-time teacher of design at Central School of Arts and Crafts.
c. 1930	Went on a 5-month camping expedition to extreme southern area of Cornwall to paint.
1931	Living at 1a Queen Anne's Gardens, Bedford Park, London, W4, a small studio residence, but also painted in Cornwall.
	Three paintings accepted by Royal Academy and one by London Group.
	P. G. Konody, Art critic of *The Observer* bought *Sunday Morning Chiswick*.
1932	Painted in Cornwall, mainly farm and coastal scenes.
1933	First one-man show April 27th–May 27th *Vere Temple and John Tunnard*. The Redfern Gallery, 27 Old Bond Street, subtitled *Paintings of Cornwall*.
	After the Redfern show bought caravan in Mitcham and moved to the same vicinity of the Lizard peninsula, Cornwall. Rented half a fisherman's loft and started a hand-blocked silk industry with his wife.
1934	Became member of the London Group.
1935	Paintings begin to be less representational and become more abstract. Wrote passionate attack on otter hunting for the *Oxford Mail* June 13th.
1936	Paintings influenced by Klee and Miró. Given by his wife the book *Surrealism* 1936 edited by Herbert Read.
1937	April/May Surrealist Section. Artists International Association (A.I.A.) at 41 Grosvenor Square, London.
	April 28th received letter from Henry Moore suggesting he send photographs of his work to show collectors from abroad.
c. 1937	*Surrealism* Gordon Fraser Gallery, Portugal Place, Cambridge, arranged (with the help of Roland Penrose) by the Cambridge University Art Society. Included a number of English artists but also Arp, Breton, Dali, Ernst, Duchamp, Eluard, Klee, Magritte, Masson, Mesens, Miró, Picasso, Man Ray, Tanguy.
1938	Met Peggy Guggenheim.

1939 Jan/Feb *Living art in England* London Gallery.
Classed as 'abstract' artist in *London Bulletin*.
March *Abstract paintings by nine British artists* Alex Reid and Lefevre.
March 16th–April 18th, 2nd one-man show. *Paintings and watercolours by John Tunnard* Guggenheim Jeune.
July 22nd–August 19th *British Surrealist and Abstract Paintings*. Northampton City Art Gallery.

1940 Enrolled as auxiliary coastguard at Cadgwith and served throughout the war.
England Today (British Council) Sydney and Melbourne, Australia.
June/July *Surrealism Today*. Zwemmer Gallery, London.
June 18th–July 6th *Modern English Painting*. Alex Reid and Lefevre.

1941 Work shown in New York at British American Art Centre.

1942 Tate Gallery bought *Construction* 1942.
June Exhibition of modern painting and sculpture at 2 Willow Road, Hampstead, on behalf of the 'Aid to Russia' Fund of the National Council of Labour. Organised by the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants.
Spring, *Survey of modern art* at the London Museum.
June 4th–21st CEMA Exhibition Ipswich.
Jan. 8th–Feb.7th *Paintings and Drawings by English and French Artists*. Redfern Gallery.
May 23rd–June 21st *New Movements in Art*. Leicester Museum.

1943 March *For Liberty Exhibition*, paintings by members of the A.I.A. sponsored by the *News Chronicle*.
British Council survey of English art shown in South America.

1944 Museum of Modern Art, New York bought *Fugue* 1938.
May A.I.A. exhibition, in a special Zwemmer Gallery Room. Oct. 23rd–Nov. 16th *John Tunnard Noted British Abstractionist*, Nierendorf Gallery, New York.
CEMA Exhibition, Rugby.

1945 *Quelques contemporaines anglais*. 28 Avenue des Champs Elysées, Paris.
March/April *Contemporary British Artists*. Buchholz Gallery, New York.

1946 Became art master at Wellington College for 2 or 3 terms.
Contemporary British Art. An exhibition organised by the British Council and toured by the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio. *Modern British Pictures from the Tate Gallery* exhibited under the auspices of the British Council, Brussels, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Paris, Berne, Vienna, Prague, Warsaw, Rome.

1947 Sold cottage in Cadgwith and rented a house on moors, *Morvah*, near Zennor. School Prints Ltd commissioned and published a lithograph.
British painters, past and present, Alex Reid and Lefevre, London.

1947 April 21st–May 17th *John Tunnard*, Bignou Gallery, New York.
November/December *John Tunnard*, Lefevre, London.

1948 Took part-time teaching job at Penzance School of Art teaching design.

1949 *Eleven British Artists in Australia*, British Council tour to Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Hobart, Launceston.

1951 Designed mural for Festival of Britain, in a temporary restaurant on the South Bank.
Sixty Paintings for 51, Arts Council Exhibition.
Painters of the Sea. Western Region. Arts Council.

1953 Moved to Laura Knight's old house, Trethinick, Lamorna.

1959 November/December, John Tunnard McRoberts and Tunnard Ltd, London.

1960 Recommenced exhibiting at the Royal Academy.
July 21st–August 31st *Paintings in Cornwall* 1960. City Art Gallery, Plymouth.
November 1st–26th *John Tunnard* Durlacher Bros. New York.

1961 November 29th–December 22nd *John Tunnard*. McRoberts and Tunnard Ltd, London.

1962 June 3rd–July 1st *Malerei der Gegenwart ans Sudenwestengland*, Kunstverein, Hanover.
December *Tunnard* Galleria l'Attico, Rome.
October 13th–November 25th *British Art and the Modern Movement*, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.
Arranged by the Welsh Committee of the Arts Committee.

1964/5 December 31st–March 7th. *The Peggy Guggenheim Collection*. The Tate Gallery, London, arranged by the Arts Council.

1965 March/April *Art in Britain 1930–40* centred around Axis, Circle, Unit One. Marlborough Fine Art Ltd, London.

1967 June 28th–July 22nd. *Recent Paintings and Gouaches, John Tunnard*, the Leicester Galleries, London.
Elected A.R.A.

1971 Died in Cornwall December 18th.

Select bibliography

Julian Trevelyan, 'John Tunnard' *London Bulletin No. 12* March 15th, 1939.

R. Myerscough-Walker, 'Modern Art Explained' Part II. *The Artist* April, 1944. Interview with Tunnard.

John Anthony Thwaites, 'The Technological Eye' *The Art Quarterly* Spring, 1946, Detroit Institute of Arts.

Michael Canney, 'Science and the Artist' *Discovery* December, 1959.

Jasia Reichardt, 'John Tunnard' *Art News and Review* December 5th, 1959.
'John Tunnard at McRoberts and Tunnard Gallery', *Apollo* December 1961.

Herbert Read, 'The World of John Tunnard' *The Saturday Book – 25* 1965, Hutchinson and Company (Publishers) Ltd.

The Technological Eye
by John Anthony Thwaites

Reprinted from *The Art Quarterly* Spring 1946
Detroit Institute of Arts

ART in the twentieth century has had a way of anticipating science and technology. Wolfgang Paslen gave examples of this, in an article some years ago.[1] Landscapes of Paul Klee predicted, many years before, infra-red photography. Brancusi foretold streamlining, Arp recent camouflage, Kadinsky the effects of aerial war. And 'when at last,' wrote Paslen, 'it became possible to photograph wind, the wind appeared with the face of Max Ernst's *Nageur Aveugle.*'

Sometime at the beginning of the war in Europe, a painting by the Englishman John Tunnard was being criticized. There was a certain form, what might that represent? 'I don't know,' said the owner, not at all disturbed. 'You'll see it in the next twenty years.' But it was only some two years afterwards that the collector visited the painter in his Cornwall home. The first Radar installation on that coast was being erected then on Lizard Head, a few miles further on. Its shape was that of the form in question – painted when Radar was not yet produced. Not long afterwards another friend was visiting John Tunnard, but this time it was an engineer. Coming in and looking at a painting he exclaimed, 'What're *you* doing with Swedish Slices, there?' Tunnard was blank. He had to be told the engineering term, which he had never heard, but which was shown with mathematical correctness in his painting.

These instances fit well enough into the general frame. There is no psychology of art as yet, nothing to say how reason and intuition come to the same point independently. But this time the correspondence interested the engineer. He was occupied with a project of river regulation, could Tunnard somehow give to his specific calculations plastic Form? The painter was not sure, but he hung the blue prints in his studio, not studying them and accepting little explanation. After some months he took them down again. Later he produced a painting. It was a characteristic painting of his own; but in it were the main features of the calculus, also correct mathematically. Woven in with these were vignettes of the Fens of Lincolnshire, where the project itself was taking place and where Tunnard was born. Each part of the painting had its visual references. The landscape showed its gray-brown coloring, soft atmosphere and long perspectives. The algebraic curves expressed their inner world symbolically, obliquely, in exact proportion and two-dimensional Form. Brought to a common focus, as it were, they extended the whole perception of reality.

Tunnard does insist that this canvas is exceptional. To begin by seeing an engineering problem is opposite to the normal thing for him. He must arrive at a solution 'accidentally,' on his general intuition. This case of the con-

trary is interesting, now, because it shows how much his feeling moves along the lines of new technology. Tunnard's forecasting is thus a part of something regular – intuition racing ahead of reason along a common line. For he has freed himself from what Eric Newton calls 'the sentinel in the eye,' who for each school of art excludes everything not then acceptable. And for most painters the 'sentinel' keeps out that revolution of electrotechnics which is going on all around.

The freeing of his eye has taken Tunnard almost twenty years. It began in his student time, just after the last war. Without knowing it he was storing his subconscious with the images of the contemporary world. While others were drawing casts and studying museums, he was staring at manufactured things or technical appliances in the windows of the London stores. He was drawn to machinery as well – not only for its functioning. His need was for the visual and the intuitional, not for the rational qualities. At that time, just as it is now, he was attracted by 'things fitting into each other,' by every precision part down to the spindle of a sewing machine.

At the Royal College of Art Tunnard was the only student of his year to find industrial employment straight from school. The others' designs were drawn from the museums, while he belonged already to contemporary life. It is natural that he had been leader of the school jazz-band. At twenty-four, Tunnard was head designer for Tootals, one of the greatest textile firms in Britain. He had some more years of success in commerce before rather suddenly he gave up everything to paint.

Then there began the second stage of a gestation, going on without his knowing it in Tunnard's mind. He neither went to Bloomsbury nor to Montparnasse, in both of which they had the studio vision. But neither did he go to Weimar Germany, where they had been romantic over the machine. For his attraction to technology was just a part of an affinity to the whole sensual world. Bird watching and field naturalism are his hobbies. In Cornwall, all around the moor is crossed by power-lines, pegged out with pylons and towers for meteorology. And they do give a feel of standing space and measure to the table-land. The cliffs coated with various lichens and with flowers, in wartime carried searchlights and then later on the radio-location. There are sixty-four varieties of gulls – and of airplanes almost as many. Some, though not all, of this double character in the surroundings was present from the start. It gave the painter, clearly, a maquette, putting together what he had obtained. But in the meantime, while it came together, he made water colors of the Cornish farms. He was learning what he needed from the contemporary masters, too. Subjective landscapes like *Painting* (1934) (Fig. 2) show him as one who could absorb the influence of Klee. Abstractions from the birds and rocks around him have something of Cubism and something of Max Ernst. Non-objective ones are quite Constructivist in kind. And the final lesson, showing him his own expression, was clearly the Stringed Figurines of Moore. By the late 'thirties Tunnard's own vision had emerged, and just then hostilities began. From that time 'til the end, as an Auxiliary Coast Guard, Tunnard had his eyes upon the sea. He painted only in the intervals, with sleepless nights, often so tired that he could hardly see. In those circumstances, so it seems, the last obstacles of his consciousness gave way. Perceptions of nature, of technology and of the sea, fused at a deeper level of the mind, controlled by a rhythm with which jazz band conducting had to do, poured out on the paper and the canvases.

In Tunnard's painting now you always find the sense of aerials and powerlines, of radar and radio and other forms maybe of electrical transmission (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7). Translucent planes, volumes interpenetrating one another, the open lines and airborne quality, tension and equilibrium, are all an essence of modern steel construction (Figs. 2, 5, 6, 7, 8). There are the pure aerial vision, rather as it has been described by de Saint-Exupéry (Fig. 4); and the traveling of the camera eye (Fig. 7 for example). All these are pretty obvious. But with them there are subtler visions – light images on screens, precision instruments, strange optical devices, forms of motion, the lines of vibration or electrical discharge, transformations of material by lenses or by rays, all of which are harder to identify. Beyond these again we come to where Tunnard gave the engineering calculations plastic form. One senses algebraic curves, paths of pressure, of tension or of light; and the measurement of space as variable. Yet all is rooted in objective vision. In back of everything there are the sea and sky, minutiae of the earth and moving light and air. Only, what the painter gives is not so much the objects in themselves as the sense we have of them. He does not transcribe their appearances. Their qualities have passed through his unconscious and he sets them down with their subjective values, their emotional potential. So far as subject-matter is concerned, Tunnard escapes the studio vision, out into the actual world.

This has included, of course, the world at war. Although Tunnard has not been in 'British War Art,' it is he who has expressed the material of the war. In various paintings you can find the flame-forms of high explosive, structures in process of disintegration, the flier's world without mass or perspective (Fig. 4) or arabesques drawn on surface of the sea by ships of war. None of these things can be

transcribed; and 'war art' never got within a mile of them. The studio vision could deal only with camp trivia, leaving battle pieces to academicians.

So far we have been looking only at the painter's subject matter. His eye for technology has broken down some of the tabus of the 'sentinel,' widening the range of reference to the world of actual things. All this may be interesting or not, but as Roger Fry said long ago, in art the subject signifies only as it directs the Form. Again Tunnard is using some appearances of things, air for example and reflected light, which modern art has chosen to discard. It may be that now they can be used again in an oblique and abstract setting, but only if they do enrich the formal language or the visual poetry.

Sometimes a new color-form of Tunnard's is the metamorphosis of a common geometric one. In *Focal Point* (Fig. 1) the red sphere on a sky of Prussian blue is transformed altogether by its frame of lines; the displaced circles round it, based on color-points of black and white below. This kind of displacement would have been quite meaningless before. Now a new plastic equilibrium makes at the same time for associations, transmission and reception, focus and dispersion, which support the painting's overtones. Sometimes, on the other hand, the forms are really new ones in themselves. Some of them run through all the paintings, a sort of bobbin (Figs. 1, 5, 8), a trombone form of line (Fig. 3), a diabolo (Fig. 4), a grid (Fig. 7), a chessman-figure (Fig. 8), a hole-and-ball motive (Figs. 3, 5). Others are more occasional, as the rudder-like monumental elements of *Lunar Synthesis* (Fig. 3) and the red dart of *Oil 79*. These like the rest the painter himself cannot, and should not, identify, beyond saying 'it's a contemporary form.'

Still, Tunnard often can identify the general line and put it in his title as a guide. *Special Device* with its rectangles of white and yellow, its leaden ovoid balancing, gives those visual references to measurement, precision, equilibrium which the name implies. He contrasts this with a driftwood frame and a Moore-like sculptural form, reinforcing the material values almost violently. Out of these come a whole fresh set of plastic qualities, with associations ranging from the sensual to the mathematical. *Decision* (Fig. 4) is something which only the Futurists have tried consistently: Movement Form. In blues and grays and whites, the colors of the sky, it gives a summary of airplane forms, fragmented, distorted and displaced by speed, speed either of the object or the eye. There are forms created by motion, which otherwise could not exist at all. Yet they are consistent with the speech of form – the tail-silhouette becomes 'diabolo,' the markings are the hole-and-ball motive of other pictures. This clearly comes because the forms have been absorbed into the subconscious and digested there. But this raises still another side: Subjective Form.

The recurrence of these certain forms shown in them an obsessive quality. Their value as subjective symbols for the painter tends to assimilate the other forms to them. Such are the chessmen of *Gouache* and *Oil 78* (Fig. 8). They appear often – and always with a hypnotic quality. They are monumental and enigmatic, like the Totems of the far Northwest. Yet they still seem to derive from the vision of technology. Their ambiguity is that of a strange apparatus, for the shapes are mechanical and not organic. Occasional, non-recurring figures such as *Moa* (Fig. 6) do belong into another world. But one can trace here another artist's influence: Max Ernst, from whom the egg-embryo is taken; and the three linear devices are versions of the chessman Totem once again.

Besides the individual color-forms, Forms must include the way the painting holds together. The first thing to be seen is Tunnard's building on the Cubist *passage*. Two surfaces transform each other from their point of crossing, as for example the dark-red and cadmium in *Lunar Synthesis*. Only, from the translucence of the surfaces, they interpenetrate. They pass behind and into one another, as in the middle part of *Trial* or the left side of *Decision*. Then the translucent screens grow to lenses or reflectors – as in *Focal Point* and *Moa* – with a different perspective of their own. So the picture-space becomes a variable, just as the other elements of composition. Of the pictures illustrated here, there are two perspectives in Figs. 5 and 7 and three in Figs. 3 and 6.

This series of developments leads to a principle of composition. In modern art the picture-space has varied, certainly. From Cubism at the one extreme, with elements advancing from the picture-plane, through the flatness of Mondrian and the myopic spacing of Matisse, to Chirico's perspective at the other. Masters like Klee and Picasso have used space differently at different times. But no one seems to have varied it within one composition. And yet the box-of-space conception is inadequate not only to the mathematician but to the contemporary experience of the eye. Nor does Tunnard use it only for his plastic needs. Just as his forms, coming from outside, take on obsessive qualities in the subconscious mind, so the perspectives have an emotional and dramatic character. Tunnard brings the poetry of the irrational within the discipline of formal art. With insights from the new Technology, he fuses the Constructive and Surrealist ideas.

A composition in which the picture-space is variable must depend on rhythmic balancing. That is the only constant element, when masses, planes, bilateral symmetry

have disappeared. The surprising thing is that Tunnard throws this equilibrium directly into paint. First, usually, there come the color areas. Next his hand swings, as though with a conductor's baton, until he is content with its direction. Then he draws in the line. Sometimes, as in *Trial* or *Moa*, the composition rotates on a pivot, like a Calder Mobile. Others, such as *Oil 78* or *Forecast*, depend on the interlocking of the elements. *Flower for 1945* (Fig. 7) and *Oil 79* in different ways combine the two. But they all rely on the profiles' correspondence or deflection, on crossing of edges, definition of forms, exact plotting of relationships. To this is added Line's independent role, as structure or tension or transmission. The paintings are as finely calibrated as precision instruments. For precision, the technician's quality, is a condition of plastic values here.

The third element in Tunnard's plastic language is his surface texture. Just as his composition, it has an ancestry in modern art. One sees it in the early *Painting*, coming from the influence of Klee. From built-up areas of browns and grays, out of the painted texture in themselves, there is a growth of spaces and of forms. These then the line acknowledges. What Tunnard has done is further to detach the texture as an element. These surfaces are an articulated membrane in themselves. They come up into rock-like mass and fall away in mist or as reflected light. Often, as in *Trial* or *Moa*, they weave doubtfully between the two. They are at once sensuously material and a mirage. This is something wholly new, and again its roots are in technology. The dry gleaming ground of *Flowers* and *Forecast's* water surfaces; the lit and shadowed textures of *Oil 78*, and in *Oil 79* the strips like *collage* and the stuck-on patch of sky, all plainly have the character of photographic film. But it underlies the rest as well. For what else but film can be translucent yet carry images?

Once we realize it we can see that this surface was the condition for most of what the painter has done. Without it, interpenetration of the elements, his principle of composition, could not be. Without it he would have found it hard to discover a texture suitable to Movement Form. In *Decision* space and volume, earth and cloud are fused by the effect of speed, in a texture giving neither depth nor yet resistance to the eye. Finally, the Natural references are assimilated by its aid. For example, in *Trial*, *Focal Point* and *Lunar Synthesis* there is a patina-like texture in the foreground. It derives, actually, from the lichen on the cliffs near Tunnard's home. But by means of this filmic quality it is detached and plastically transformed. And so it is with every other texture of the paintings.

'Anything which represents air,' declared Gertrude Stein, 'is illustration and not art.' And painting since Impressionism *has* avoided 'atmosphere' while Cubism and Abstract Art abolished almost all effects of light as well. Tunnard not only brings back all these things; he makes into one of his chief instruments reflected light an effect which has been left to the academicians for a century. The result is *plein air* abstraction, an unknown thing in Europe and approached only by certain painters in the States, such as Marin, Dove and Weisenborn.

Forecast is perhaps the best example. Without reflected light the painter could not render sensuous either depth or surface of the sea. Without atmosphere the long beach perspective would become as airless as Tanguy. Without light penetration the curving lens would be invisible. In short, without this *plein airisme* its strong objective roots would be cut off. For as it is, the Moore-like sculpture form does gain the same vitality as Moore's own carvings do when placed outdoors. And the impact is the same on the forms, more technological, of *Flower* and *Special Device*. Mysterious as they are, they suddenly become a part of sensual life. Reflection is also a condition for the texture surfaces as refraction is of the transparent and translucent planes. Adrian Stokes has pointed out[3] that an effect of luminosity can only be obtained by the virtual blackout of a painting. That is so when tones are naturistically used, for then comparison with real contrasts of the light is challenged. But here light is not represented. It comes out as a plastic thing, equivalent to sense experience, just as are the spaces and the forms.

Another reason for this independence in his light is the quality of Tunnard's color. He never bases it on discords or strong complementaries. The different areas tend to have a chromatic element in common, which each awakens in the other. This gives intensity without the need of violent color. On the other hand he does not muffle it to keep 'in tone,' as English painters have tended to do from Sickert to Moynihan. For his contrasts are controlled by shifts of tone, in much the way that Stokes desiderates. For example the dark red-purples on the left of *Trial* play against much lighter yellow in the bobbin-form. Or in *Focal Point* dark Indian-reds balance the delicate blue-grays. Again, with mixed tones the contrasts will bring out implicit values. Thus blues central to *Lunar Synthesis* evoke the yellow in its ground of gray. The result is that all these colors have what Mr Stokes calls 'Inner Light' as though illumination were behind. So, when there is an actual effect of light it is not from the outside, but always emerges from the color-zones.

Another consequence of what Stokes calls 'all-over quality' is color relations balancing all through. Every part is playing against each other, without a break between the different areas. Thus background and fore-

ground are unified, sections equally positive in a color continuum. And this again is the condition for that interpenetration which we saw before. Or rather, both are aspects of the same expression. Not that Tunnard avoids contrasts altogether. He uses a single note to set the composition quivering, the red ball in *Focal Point* on Prussian blue, in *Oil 79* the red dart set against the sky, or pinks at the center of *Gouache*, where otherwise blue-grays and blues would govern everything. But the climax of his method is his use of white. It becomes, what in Stokes' eyes it should always be, a color; and the most positive, since it contains all others. Sometimes it even dominates the composition, as the line and oval in *Gouache*, the form at the center of *Decision* and the horizontal slip across *Oil 78*. Strong and strategically placed, the whites draw to themslves all the colors of the painting.

In every tendency of art, perhaps, which brings something really new, there is a fresh conception of the color. And Tunnard is as different in this respect from the Constructivists – effective in proportion as they were cold – as he is from the Expressionists, whose color was a symbol of emotion. It would be clearest to describe his palette as *impersonal*. There is something at once detached and penetrating, objective and generalised, about these harmonies. Not that they have no subjective side. Color is necessarily the base of the irrational wherever it occurs. For example in the sardonically titled *Flower for 1945* a strange blue-red is dominant. In the dog-toothed form and a translucent central curve it shades almost to black. Then a lighter tone colors the background like a tinted photograph, and echoes in a fresh transparency. The other color prevalent is iron-gray, with touches of sky-blue and cadmium, greens warm and cold and a strong white at the bottom, making all the rest. The dominant is really an unstable balance between red and blue, to which the eye cannot adjust itself. This physiological effect creates unease, a sort of suspense and repulsion, cold and yet dramatic. It goes with the sinister and spiky forms, the enigmatic ovals and the penetrations. The picture was painted months earlier than the atomic bomb; but the association here is plain. Through the technomorphic forms, from the silhouette but still more from the color, comes a clear connection with Japan. And the more the overtones take their effect, the more the painting seems to be soaked in blood. The cycle of prediction, what Paalen called 'the prefigurative image,' is complete.

[1] "The New Image," *DYN.*, 1 (April-May, 1942).
[2] Adrian Stokes, *Colour and Form*, London, 1937.

The list of captions to the illustrations as they appeared in the original article has been included. It has not been possible to reproduce the illustrations here.

Fig. 1 *Focal point* 1943
Fig. 2 *Painting* 1934
Fig. 3 *Lunar synthesis* 1943
Fig. 4 *Decision* 1944
Fig. 5 *Trial* 1944
Fig. 6 *Moa* 1943
Fig. 7 *Flower for 1945*
Fig. 8 *Oil 78* 1943

The World of John Tunnard by Herbert Read

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JOHN TUNNARD is an individualist. For more than thirty years he has preferred to cut a path of his own through the jungle of modern art. He began his career as a designer in the textile industry, and textiles is a craft that imposes on the artist a high degree of stylisation, even of abstraction. He had further disciplinary experience as a teacher of design at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. Then in 1930 Tunnard left London and moved to Cornwall, where together with his wife he set up a workshop for hand-blocked printed silks. As soon as he was settled in this new environment he began to paint.

The style he then found has remained remarkably consistent from the beginning, and even in technique and format there is not much variation. It is possible that some of his characteristic effects in the handling of colour were inspired by the silk-screen process, and there is even a suggestion of the threads of the loom in some of his compositions. From the beginning there was a mastery of oil, water-colour and gouache, but gouache remained his favoured medium and of this medium he has become one of the most skilled masters in England.

Tunnard immediately found a formal language of his own, and one that is not imitative or obviously related to the style of any of his immediate predecessors. It has some affinity to the early improvisations of Kandinsky (1911–15), and painters like André Masson, Miró and Matta may enter into comparison, for reasons which I shall try to explain, but this is because of similar intentions and is not a question of direct influence. There can be no doubt that Tunnard was inspired by the prevailing 'will to abstraction', but I believe his inspiration comes from a source somewhat unusual in modern art – nature.

It is well known that Tunnard is an expert naturalist – a lepidopterist, a botanist and life-long observer of all forms of animal and plant life. He had lives with nature as intimately as Gilbert White or Thoreau, and his painting is always related to the forms of nature – not so much to the outward forms, though these do sometimes appear as identifiable images, but rather to that inner morphology which is the secret of nature. By this I do not mean anything so obvious as the structure of organisms as revealed by science, but rather the formative principle itself, a grasp of which enables the artist to create forms that are analogous to those in nature. I do not know whether Tunnard is familiar with Goethe's theories of morphology (I do not claim more than a superficial knowledge of them myself), but in Goethe we find the distinction I wish to make.

'The German', says Goethe, 'has the word *Gestalt* to designate the complex of being of an actual organism. In using this term he ignores the factor of mobility; he

assumes that a composite entity is precisely delimited and fixed. But when we examine whatever confronts us in the way of *Gestalt*, we find that nothing fixed, static, or precisely delineated occurs and that everything is in a ceaseless state of flux. . . . That which is formed is straightaway transformed again, and if we would to some degree arrive at a living intuition of nature, we must on our part remain forever mobile and plastic, according to her own example'. [1]

Tunnard is an artist who has acquired by observation a profound intuition of the workings of nature, and this enables him to imagine forms that represent the morphology of nature in its ceaseless state of flux. That intuition prevents the artist from becoming a mere manipulator of a lifeless geometry. His forms are the inventions of his imagination but that imagination is a complete world, in some sense a prophetic world. He himself has said that after he has painted a picture he will sometimes come across a form he has used without knowing that it existed in nature. This is credible because he works with a visual imagination that is familiar with archetypal forms – those universal patterns from which all particular forms evolve – forms which, as Goethe said, no Time or Force can destory because they are born and reborn like living organisms:

> *und keine Zeit und Macht zerstueckelt*
> *gepraegte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt.*

And this is the sense of form that Tunnard possesses – not so much form as an objective reality but rather form as a prototype assuming an infinity of variations as the creative life force unfolds itself in time and space.

Paul Klee had a similar conception of art and certain similarities are to be found between Klee's paintings and Tunnard's, but Klee is more playful, more musical and immensely more prolific (and this distinction applies to another comparable artist, Joan Miró). I have already mentioned André Masson, and he perhaps provides the nearest parallel to John Tunnard. Masson is more humanistic (in the literal sense of often representing the human figure, which is absent from Tunnard's world) and more erotic, but he has the same sense of what he calls 'the secret world of analogy', that fraternity of natural form which Baudelaire called *correspondences*.

'The grating of torn silk is like the cry of the knife in the bark of the oak – The adorable foam, thrown up by the ocean, filling, then overflowing, the high-heeled shoe of a woman; the voluptuous spiral of the smoke of a fire of vine in the summer air rejoins the endless trellis of dreams of abysses on the confines of the erotic' – how nearly these sentences from Masson's *Anatomy of my Universe* describe Tunnard's universe.

Masson's work (and his words) also suggest another aspect of Tunnard's work – what might be called its cosmic overtones. There is a drawing of Masson's which he calls 'The Unity of the Cosmos' and though this drawing is not particularly like any one painting of Tunnard's, the caption reads: 'There is nothing inanimate in the world: a correspondence exists between the *virtues* of minerals, plants, stars and animal bodies' – a perfect expression of the principle underlying Tunnard's art.

Virtues – that is perhaps the key-word to all this type of art; originally it meant 'the power of operative influence inherent in a supernatural or divine being' as embodied in a person or thing, and that is the sense in which we might speak of the forms in Tunnard's paintings. They extract a virtue from earth and sky and sea and all that has existence between them, and these embodied essences are composed into a dream landscape, a 'dream of a future desert'. If there is some suggestion of cosmic space, it is prophetic of the present popular interest in that subject. Tunnard's space is poetic, not scientific; or belongs to that superreality where science and poetry are indistinguishable.

Tunnard is, of course, a surrealist if that word has any precise meaning. He has not actively participated in the Surrealist Movement as such, but if surrealism is to be defined, in the phrase of André Breton, as 'pure psychic automatism', then I know no artist who has more consistently practised surrealism. In comparison the automatism of a Dali or a Max Ernst seems 'contrived'. Much closer to Tunnard is a painter whom I have always considered the purest (if the word may be excused in this context) of the Surrealists – Yves Tanguy. Tanguy's typical forms are more restricted – amoebic forms, or the cacti and dried bones of the desert – but nevertheless they belong to the morphology of the universe and there is a distinct similarity between the landscape disposition of the elements of the composition which both painters favour. There is also the same suggestion of infinite space, Masson's 'dream of the future desert'. Even in their preferences for a modest format and for gouache as a medium give the two artists some degree of affinity. But Tunnard's desert is not so prickly and leafless; it is not even the waste land –

> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water . . .

It may be a sublunary landscape, but the images are intact, and their virtue is organic. Always in Tunnard's work, however *dislocated* they may be, the images have an

essentially organic origin, and even when the painting is organised geometrically, with the fabric designer's precision, one is still aware of a vital process, of an implicit animism.

Animism and vitalism are similar concepts, and they imply a virtue which is more mechanical – dynamism. At times this characteristic in Tunnard's compositions threatens to disrupt the organic harmony – titles like 'Release', 'Flurry', 'Signal', 'Intersection', 'Flux', indicate geometrical lines of force rather than organic development. But nature, at least in its cosmic aspects, is also violent, and an art that did not reflect this fact would be too tame. The ideal is to find a synthesis of growth and form; but again, the forms that develop as living organisms.

The final effect is that of a dream-landscape, but 'land' must imply more than earth, and more than land and sea. The 'scape' is the limits of imaginative vision. Whatever the nature of the landscape, cosmic, telluric or, as often, submarine, the world created by this artist is a credible one. His work often reminds me of Sir Thomas Browne's *Garden of Cyrus*, where he speaks of those 'phantasmes of sleep, which often continueth praecogitations, making Cables of Cobwebbes and Wildernesses of handsome Groves'. Sir Thomas concludes: 'All things began in order, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the ordainer of order and mystical Mathematicks of the City of Heaven'. A painting by John Tunnard begins in the order of nature; it traverses the phantasms of the imagination; and then ends in the order of art, which is an analogy of the mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven.

1 *Goethe: Wisdom & Experience*. Translated by Hermann J. Weigand; 1949.